The SHORN LAMB

Emma Speed Sampson

Peace Kathleen

from

Auntie

June 20th 1962

New Smyrna Beach- Fla

The Shorn Lamb

Alice Garnett

The Shorn Lamb

BY

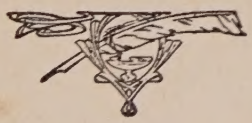
Emma Speed Sampson

Author of

"Mammy's White Folks,"

"Billy and the Major,"

"Miss Minerva's Baby"



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The Shorn Lamb

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"God tempers the wind to
the shorn lamb"

The Shorn Lamb

Chapter 1

A MULTIPLICITY OF PARENTS

"I'll be hanged if I give up my lower to her even though she is a hundred years old," muttered Philip Bolling to himself as he tried to make room for his belongings in the Pullman section, already overflowing with a miscellaneous collection of boxes and bags. Crouched in the corner was a tiny little old lady. She held a newspaper before her face with trembling hands, encased in black cotton gloves several sizes too large.

"I reckon I'll have to, though," he added. "Such an old lady would be more trouble over one than under—and then, besides, I shouldn't be grouchy."

Suddenly he burst out laughing, and then to hide his merriment he pretended to sneeze. The little old woman, who dropped her newspaper as the train started, turned out to be not a little old woman at all but a little girl in her early

teens. She was a sallow-faced little creature who seemed to be all eyes. Her little figure was lost in the folds of a black cotton blouse, much too large for her, and on her head was a mourning bonnet of the type usually worn by widows, with white ruching showing in a line next to her face and a heavy crepe veil hanging down behind.

"I hope you haven't caught cold, sir," she said as Philip pretended to sneeze. "Mrs. O'Shea told me sleeping cars were mighty good places to catch colds in and she put in some castor oil in case I should feel a cold coming on. There'll be plenty for you to have some, too, and I'd be delighted to give it to you."

"Thank you! I wouldn't deprive you for worlds," smiled Philip. "I don't believe it is a cold — just train smoke."

"Well, if you want some you must ask me for it. You see I have never had the pleasure of giving anybody a dose of castor oil, and I'd simply love to do it. It must be delightful to be the one to do the giving. When the Bible says it is more blessed to give than receive, maybe it means castor oil."

"Maybe!" assented Philip.

"I believe we are to keep house together for the journey. Mrs. O'Shea told me someone

would occupy the apartment with me, but she was sure it would be a lady. Mrs. O'Shea is most particular. She is the most ladyfiedish person in the world. She told me I mustn't talk to anyone on the train unless it was the lady who was in the apartment with me or a man in brass buttons. Of course since you are not a lady I shall have to pretend you are to talk to you. Mrs. O'Shea would not have me to be rude to the person who was going to keep house with me. Mrs. O'Shea is terribly particular about manners."

"And who is Mrs. O'Shea?" asked Philip, who was feeling like laughing again and wondering how he would hide it.

"Oh! she is a lady friend," replied the child primly, "almost the only perfect lady friend Daddy and I had. We had lots of nice men friends and a few painty and modelly girls we liked a lot, but Mrs. O'Shea can't abide 'em, and after Daddy died she wouldn't let me see any of them. She just took matters in her own hands and managed some mourning clothes for me, and wrote to my grandfather down in Virginia, and got me a ticket and put me on the train. Mrs. O'Shea is a terribly managy person. Not that I am not very grateful to her for taking so much interest in me, but I wanted

to see some of the others before I left New York."

The child's lip trembled and her eyes filled. She felt in her pocket and produced a handkerchief with a broad black hem and wiped away the tears; then blew her nose.

"You must excuse me, but sometimes I have to leak a little. Mrs. O'Shea says it is quite ladylike to cry, but one must do it without blowing one's nose. I haven't learned how yet. Of course Mrs. O'Shea has had so much practice. She has lost four husbands, besides a mother and father, two stepmothers and one stepfather and quite a batch of uncles and aunts and cousins and some stepchildren, but I don't believe she had to keep from blowing her nose when they died. She never said so—she's too ladylike to say anything, even about stepchildren, but she used to tell me all the things she wouldn't say about them. I felt kind of sad about the stepchildren because I'm some myself."

"Some of hers?" asked Philip.

"Oh, my, no! None of my fathers would have married Mrs. O'Shea, even if she had sighed herself to death. You see she used to clean up our studio, and darn our stockings, and wash up the tea things, and brush my hair, and do all kinds of odd jobs for us. No, I am

Daddy's stepchild—at least I was." Again the pocket was found and the mourning bordered handkerchief brought into play. "And I was papa's stepchild and then mamma's."

"Daddy and I weren't much like steps, though. He wasn't a bit particular and neither was I, so we got along something scrumptious. Of course Daddy had a few rules of conduct, and I tried not to break them, unless it seemed wisest. He used to tell me to use my judgment about such matters. You see Daddy was an individualist, and he believed in everybody's living his own life."

"I see!" said Philip. "But what were the few rules?"

"One of them was, I must watch the traffic cop and wait till he gave the signal before I crossed the street."

"A good rule of conduct," laughed the young man.

"And another rule was that I mustn't sass old people until they first sassed me."

"Excellent!"

"One reason Daddy was so inclined to feel that I must work out my own destiny—that is the way he put it—was that he and I were so terribly far removed as far as blood went, but we got along just fine. Would you like to

hear all about my funny relations to poor Daddy?"

The young man expressed his desire to hear. The little girl was more entertaining than his own dull musings. Philip Bolling's own rather lonely boyhood had sharpened his sympathies, instead of stunting them. The little creature whom Fate had decreed was to set up "housekeeping" with him for the journey would have touched a harder heart than his, with her pathetic mouth and her great dark eyes that one moment showed unfathomed depths of despair and another sparkled with humor.

"Won't you take off your hat first?" he suggested. "One can't go to housekeeping very well in a great bonnet. Let me hang it up for you."

"We-ell, it *is* rather heavy, but Mrs. O'Shea did not tell me whether I was to take it off or not. Mrs. O'Shea spent a night on a sleeper once, a long, long time ago, when she was married to her first. Of course she could tell me just what I must and mustn't take off, but she didn't mention my bonnet. She told me particularly not to leave anything in the dressing room because the porter would steal it. I don't believe the porter would want a widow's bonnet though, do you?"

Philip thought not, but assured her he would hang the bonnet on a hook right in their section.

"Mrs. O'Shea doesn't like colored persons and always takes for granted they will steal; but as for me, I simply adore them. Daddy said I inherit liking them from my first father, who was a Southern man. He liked 'em a whole lot."

"You promised to tell me about your relations to your stepfather," suggested Philip as he settled the bonnet on a safe hook and then smiled into the eyes of his little companion. She had drawn off her huge cotton gloves, disclosing small, delicately shaped hands, which she folded primly in her lap. Her little face was much more childlike now that the ugly bonnet was gone. The corners of her mouth came up as though the weight of the bonnet had held them down. Her blue-black hair had broken from the tight braids into which Mrs. O'Shea had plaited it and curled rebelliously over the small, well-shaped head.

"Well," she said, settling herself comfortably and smiling into the frank blue eyes of her new friend, "I might just as well begin at the beginning. I always went with the studio, kind of like a cat or the gas range. Maybe that isn't the beginning, though. I guess my mother and

father are the beginning, although the studio is something that kept on staying, and I believe I'm going to miss it something awful.

"My Father, my first father, I mean, was a great big man, with shiny yellow hair, and he was an artist. Daddy says he would have been a great artist if he had lived long enough. Daddy used to know him real well and used to sigh and sigh when he turned over his drawings in the big portfolio."

"Then the studio must have started with your father," suggested Philip.

"Yes, he was the first. It was a great big studio down on West Tenth, and you had to go through somebody's house to get to it, unless you wanted to go over the roof and down the Mygatts' fire escape. Sometimes Daddy and I chose that route, when we were hard up and didn't want to meet the person in the house in front who had a way of collecting rents. It was the charmingest studio in the whole village because it had outside steps and a little porch. Just think of a porch in New York! One time it used to be over a stable, but by and by the stable got to be a garage. Things changed all around, but the studio was always just the same. It was big and had side windows and a skylight, too, and all kinds of nice cubby holes and cor-

ners, and we had a gas stove in one corner behind a screen, and a bath tub in another, and nice soft divans all around and you could sleep on any one you'd a mind to.

"My first father married my first mother in Paris. I was born on shipboard on the way back to New York. I was always sorry I wasn't born in the studio. Mother was a singer and a Bohemian, I mean a really, truly Bohemian, not just a villager. I can remember her real well, and can remember my father some. I can remember how shiny his hair was when he stood under the skylight and painted my mother, and I can remember the way he laughed. He was always laughing. He used to laugh at the way my mother talked and the way I walked. You see I was only about half past four when he died. He used to tell jokes and stories all about the colored people from down South, and everybody loved him. We had parties all the time, because my mother was so gay. She used to sing at the parties and I'd go to sleep on any divan where there was room. I used to be very happy.

"Then when my first father died my first mother pretty near died too. She screamed and screamed, and wanted to kill herself, but Mrs. O'Shea, who lived in the back room in the house

in front of us, came over and talked to her and comforted her, because you see Mrs. O'Shea had lost so many husbands she knew all about how hard it was, and there was nothing she couldn't tell about what to do. Mrs. O'Shea has always come over and 'tended to our funerals.

"By and by my mother smiled again, and we had parties again, and one day she came in and kissed me and said: 'Rebecca, here is a new father for you!' The new father was the kind of Bohemian mother was, and he didn't like to work a bit. He was very handsome, with a black mustache and white teeth. Mother had to sing awfully hard to keep my new father comfortable, and she got so thin with engagements that she was afraid she would fall down the cracks in the studio floor. Then she caught cold and before you know it Mrs. O'Shea had to come over and look after another funeral."

"How old were you then?" asked Philip.

"I was seven. I felt very lonesome and miserable when my mother was gone. She was the gayest mother in the world and never was cross, but my second father was not a bit gay, just lazy. He was kind enough and he loved me—maybe because I waited on him so much. Mrs. O'Shea wanted me to come and sleep at her house, but he wouldn't let me, and he wept over

me, and begged me not to leave him all forlorn and lonesome, and besides, I didn't want to leave the studio because I loved it."

The child paused a moment and her eyes looked as full of mystery and as unfathomable as the corners of the beloved studio of which she was dreaming.

"But this second father of mine—I called him Papa—got over being so sad after a while, and he brought a very pretty lady home one day and told me I had a new mamma. She was a Southerner, from Georgia. I called her Mamma. She was kind sometimes, and sometimes she was cross. She used to get very angry with Papa because he was so lazy. Mamma was a dancer and made a great deal of money. She wanted Papa to learn to dance with her, and he could do it beautifully, but he would get so tired and refuse to practice. He wouldn't even play the piano for her, and she got a Victrola, and he wouldn't even wind it up. I learned to do that, though, and I used to make her coffee and take it to her in the morning and she would pet me and praise me. Papa got lazier and lazier and one morning he just refused to get out of bed. You should have heard Mamma quarrel with him then! 'Loafer! Rapscallion! Sponger.' There were worse things, too, but Mrs. O'Shea

told me I must try to forget the bad things, and I'm trying to.

"Mamma was learning a dance with a dagger in it, and it had a wild tune that kind of got on Papa's nerves, and she practiced it all the time, and danced and danced. I had to keep the Victrola going for hours at a time and play the same record over and over, and she would whirl around and around and pretend to stick the dagger in Papa. She was just teasing him and I knew it and laughed, until I saw he was scared of her. My, she was pretty when she whirled around! The dagger wasn't anything but a paper knife and couldn't have hurt him even if she had struck real hard. One day she had practiced her dance until she knew it almost perfectly, and was just going to stop. She signaled to me to stop the Victrola and then she gave a final whirl and twirled on her toes right by Papa's couch. He had not been off it for weeks then. Every morning he bathed and dressed and got back on his couch, where he smoked and dozed all day. As I was saying, Mamma gave a twirl and cried out: 'Loafer!' and pretended to stick the dagger in Papa's heart. But just before she touched him she saw his eyes and gave a scream and dropped by his side, and I didn't know it wasn't part of her

dance, and I clapped my hands the way she liked me to do because she said one could dance so much better if some one applauded.

"Mrs. O'Shea had to come over and look after another funeral. The doctor said Papa had died of heart disease and must have had it a long time, and that was what made him so lazy. Poor Mamma cried and cried and said her heart was broken, too, just like Papa's, and that she could never dance again, but by and by she did, and she made a big hit with the very dance she had been studying so hard.

"Now this is where Daddy comes in and he was the best of all. Of course my first father was best but I can't remember him the way I can Daddy. Mrs. O'Shea says it is proper always to say you love your own mother and father better than any steps. Daddy saw Mamma do the dagger dance and he fell head over heels in love with her and came to call on her at the studio where she just stayed on after Papa died because it was big and gave her room for practice, and the lease wasn't up, and then I loved it so and hated to think of moving.

"Daddy got to coming to see us every day and he fell in love with me, too, so he said, and by and by he and Mamma went to the Little Church Around the Corner and got married,

with me for a bridesmaid. I was awfully glad, but I felt real mean not to warn Daddy about how cross Mamma got sometimes. He thought she was an angel and used to tell her so, and she would look like one, too. Mamma was as pretty as pretty can be, and Daddy used to make poetry to her. Daddy was a poet, you know, but he didn't make a living writing poetry, but had to write what he called 'rot' for Sunday papers to make money.

"We got along pretty well for awhile, although every now and then Mamma would fly off the handle and make things hum for Daddy and me, and then we'd go out walking, and sometimes go spend the day at the Zoo or down to Coney Island, and when we'd come back she would have quieted down. I was nine then. I don't know what I'd have done without Daddy. He was the dearest little man and so kind and so clever I think he got over being in love with Mamma because she had a limited intelligence. I got that from him, but he was sorry he said it and asked me to forget it. She had more sense in her toes than in her head.

"Suddenly Mamma got so she didn't like me any more. I had been the biggest kind of pet, and all of a heap she began treating me like she did poor Papa, only she couldn't call me loafer

because I was doing things for her all the time, but she got to calling me 'sponger' and 'brat' and 'poor-house trash,' and said in the South they would call me 'po' kin.' And Daddy got as mad as fire and up and told her to stop. I would have gone away if there had been any place to go to, but Mrs. O'Shea was off burying some of her folks and I just had to stay, so I crawled way down in a crack back under the eaves of the studio and I stayed there, but I could hear them quarreling. She told Daddy he could 'choose between us,' and he said, 'Melodramatic nonsense!' And she told him there were other men of her acquaintance quite as attractive as he was. He said, 'No doubt! You are quite welcome to choose between us, or rather *among* us.' You see Daddy was mighty particular about his English," said the child proudly. She rattled on:

"Then he persuaded me to come out from the crack where I was hiding, and smoothed my hair and kissed me, and made me wash my face, and we got on the subway and went out to see where Edgar Allan Poe lived in a cunning little cottage, but when Poe lived there it was country with green fields and a little stream of water. Now there is nothing but a great sewer where the stream used to be, and all the fields are

built up with great high buildings that make the cottage look like a doll-baby house."

"Yes, I have been there often," put in Philip. "I had the honor of bumping my head on three different lintels in the Poe cottage, but I am too tall for a doll-baby house."

"I am so glad you know the place. You can understand how nice it was to go there and get in what Daddy called 'another atmosphere' after Mamma had been quarreling so loud. Daddy told me all about Poe and recited a lot of his poetry, and told me when I got a little older I could read all his tales. I have read them all now, even 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' but I had fearful dreams after it, and thought an orang-outang had come up the Mygatts' fire escape and carried off Daddy.

"Well, then we started home, having comforted each other a whole lot and decided we would try to be mighty nice to poor Mamma, who didn't mean to be so cross. Daddy got a box of chocolates for her, and I borrowed some money from him and bought a bunch of violets from a man on the corner. They were not quite fresh, but they smelled fine, and I thought Mamma would not notice how they looked she would be so glad we were home. And Daddy got some French chops for dinner, and some

eclairs, and we planned to have a kind of make-up party.

"When we got home the studio was dark and I felt a funny creepy feeling down my back. I was kind of scared and held on tight to Daddy's hand. When we lit the gas we didn't know at first what was the matter; things were in such a mess. But when we got used to the light and looked around a bit we found all of Mamma's pretty dresses were gone, and her three big trunks that used to be shoved back in one of the largest closets, and then Daddy saw a letter stuck in the mirror, and when he read it he whistled a long whistle and then he laughed a kind of hard laugh.

"'Well, Beck child, Mamma has gone and left me to hold the bag.'

"And I said, 'Am I the bag, Daddy?'

"'No, honey, let's say the studio is the bag and you are the strings to the bag.'

"Then we got busy and had dinner. We put the violets on the table and they spried up a lot. I cooked the chops and we had the eclairs for dessert, and Daddy opened a bottle of champagne in honor of the occasion. Altogether the make-up party was a great success. The next day we got Mrs. O'Shea over to straighten us up, and it was kind of like a funeral, the way

she went around, only there wasn't any corpse.

"Daddy and I had mighty peaceful times after that. He taught me, so I didn't have to go to school, and Mrs. O'Shea looked after my manners and morals. We began to have nice talky parties again. Poor Mamma wouldn't have talky parties. She liked the kind where people danced and made a noise, but Daddy and I liked the talky ones. Painting and writing people used to come, and nice girls who petted me. Mrs. O'Shea said they were dangerous persons, but Mrs. O'Shea is something of a 'fraid cat. Such happy times!" This time the handkerchief had to be used in good earnest.

"Isn't it funny that we cry over good times more than bad ones? Daddy was the charmingest person that ever was. He had a great sense of responsibility, too, and was determined I mustn't forget my first father and mother. He had known them very well, and he used to tell me all kinds of sweet things about them. He remembered the funny stories my first father told about the colored people at home and he used to tell them to me. Such ridiculous things about a dear old black woman! And he would sing some of the songs too—'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' and 'I'm a Rollin' Through an Onfriendly World.' Daddy said he wanted me

to realize I was a Southern lady and not just studio property.

"He felt very sad that I didn't know any children, but there weren't very many children to know, because Daddy's friends were most of them so busy being individualists they didn't stop to have any children. They had theories about children, but no children. We planned to go to live in the country some day and have a cat and a dog, and maybe a cow, but the day never came because Daddy began to get sick. By and by he got so sick he couldn't write and he used to dictate to me. I tell you it was hard work to cross my t's and dot my i's and keep up with Daddy at first, but after a while he got so slow I could do it easily. I would take the copy over to one of the nice girls who came to our parties, and she would type it and see that it got to the Sunday paper on Friday.

"Then Daddy got so he couldn't dictate and the money got low, but he felt so sick he didn't know anything about the money and I didn't tell him. I began to pawn things. I started in on the Apostle spoons. My first father had a collection of them and I felt as I sold them that the Saints were looking after us. Then my first mother's jewelry! That kept us a long time. I hated to let that go because I could

remember the way she loved the little bangly things that tinkled like sweet bells, but for Daddy's sake I would have pawned my eyes and gone around the rest of my life being led by a little dog on a string.

"Then I started in on the dress suits, long-tailed and dinner coats too. First went father's! That had to go cheap because the waiter at The Golden Calf, who bought it, complained that it was out of style, with the tails too long and the trousers a bit too full. Papa had three dress suits and we lived a long time on them. I didn't sell Daddy's dress suit until the doctor had an expression on his face that made me know Daddy would never want it again. Daddy never liked it much, anyhow, and hated to dress up. Mrs. O'Shea didn't like my selling it at all. I knew what she was thinking about, but I pretended I didn't. I was determined that Daddy shouldn't be laid to rest in something he didn't like."

The child paused, looking at her listener with great eyes that seemed to hold the woe of centuries. Philip leaned forward and took one of her tiny hands in his. To think of such a little girl's having gone through so much misery!

"It is funny for me to be telling you all this. I can't think what got me going so. I am

afraid you are tired to death and won't want to keep house with me at all."

Philip protested at this:

"Not a bit of it, my dear! I am as interested as can be and want to hear all of your story. Did your daddy live much longer?"

"No, not so very long, but long enough for me to have to sell or pawn most everything in the studio."

"Why didn't your friends help you?"

"They would have, but I didn't let them know. Daddy and I always hated to be helped. I was careful not to get rid of anything that he could see. He didn't know about it, even when I rolled up rugs and dragged them off. I didn't sell any of his books. Somehow I felt that he would know about their going even if he couldn't see. It was a good thing I didn't because just the very day he died he asked me to read to him, little bits from various books. Just suppose I had sold those very books! Wouldn't it have been awful?"

Philip agreed that it would have been sad indeed.

"Mrs. O'Shea came over and 'tended to that funeral too. She found the widow's bonnet among some things Mamma forgot to take away with her and she said it would be 'propri-

ate for me to wear it because I was most like a widow anyhow."

"And now where are you going?" asked Philip.

"To a grandfather in Virginia!"

"And why hasn't he been looking after you all these years?"

"I don't know. You see I just found out I had a grandfather. Mrs. O'Shea discovered him when we cleared out the studio. There were letters to my first father from my grandfather. The letters were all quarreling letters. Some of them begged him to come home and be a manufacturer of hubs, whatever they are, and one of them was so angry because Father had married Mother. That one said he needn't ever come home again and that his father had disowned him. He must be a terrible old man to have written such letters. I feel so miserable at the thought of going to him, but Mrs. O'Shea would have it this way and here I am on the train and going. There is nothing left to pawn but the books and I couldn't let them go, and I don't know how to earn a living yet. I mean to some day, though."

"Has your grandfather written to you?" asked Philip.

"Oh, Mrs. O'Shea didn't give him time. She

just wrote to him and put me on the train. I think the letter will get to him a day or so before I do, as she put a special delivery stamp on it. Mrs. O'Shea is a mighty managy person and she acts very quickly when she makes up her mind. The minute she found the bunch of letters to Father she got started and before I knew it the ticket was bought and I was here in the sleeper, keeping house with you."

Chapter 2

"I'M REBECCA TAYLOR"

Philip Bolling's little companion paused as the entrance of the train conductor put a stop for the time being to the conversation. The child's ticket was found pinned in the front of her blouse after a nervous search through bags and boxes.

"I forgot where it was because Mrs. O'Shea told me so many times where she had put it," she laughed as the conductor punched it and put it in his pocket. "When anybody keeps on saying the same thing over and over it is hard to remember what the thing is. One telling is a lot easier to remember. You are not going to forget where I'm going are you Mr. Conductor? Somebody will have to tell me where to get off."

"That will be all right, little lady. I see this gentleman has a ticket to the same place. The porter will call you both at six in the morning. That will give you time enough I guess. You have upper twelve."

"I shall be very glad to let the young lady have my lower berth," put in Philip.

"Settle that between you," smiled the blue-uniformed one, as he passed on to the next section.

"I couldn't think of letting you give me your berth," said the girl. "Mrs. O'Shea says the downstairs ones cost more than the upstairs ones, which is quite just, where there is no elevator. I don't mind a bit climbing upstairs now that I know how they look." She had been much interested in watching the porter making down a berth at the other end of the car. "In fact I believe I'd rather mash you than have you mash me, if you don't mind. But there's one thing that worries me."

"And that is?"

"I don't see how I am to say my prayers. Mrs. O'Shea says it is ill bred to hump up in bed and pray and I always knelt down by my bed even when my bed was a divan or just a quilt on the floor, the way it was when Daddy was so sick and I had to sell all the furniture. I don't see how I can kneel down outside an upper berth, do you?"

"No, I do not," laughed Philip, "unless you had a nice fluffy cloud like the cherubs in the pictures. Did Mrs. O'Shea tell you what to do about this matter of kneeling?"

"I think not, but that may have been one of

the things she kept on telling me until I forgot."

"Perhaps you would consent to use my berth just for the devotions," he suggested.

"Perhaps—but don't you find it exciting that we are going to the same town?"

"Very exciting! Do you think your friends will meet you?"

"I don't know, but they are not my friends yet. Will yours meet you?"

"No, my people do not know when to expect me."

"Have you some people of your very own—mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers?" she catechized him.

"Yes!"

"How lovely! Don't you adore them?"

"Some of them!"

"Oh, I should just adore real mothers and fathers. I wish you would tell me something about yourself. I have told you every single thing about myself from the very beginning and I don't know a thing about you, not even your name."

"Well, my name is Philip Bolling and I live on a farm about two miles from O—— Court House," the young man replied.

"Is that all?"

"Yes!"

The child's eyes filled with tears and she looked out of the window into the growing darkness of the spring night at the twinkling lights of a village through which they were rolling. Her mouth resumed the sad droop it had shown before the heavy bonnet was removed.

"What is it?" asked her companion sympathetically. "What is the matter, my dear?"

"Nothing—but—don't you understand how it makes me feel—to have told you all that long tiresome story about myself and then for you only to tell me your name and where you live, like a city directory? I feel so sad that you shouldn't trust me at all when I trusted you so much. I don't usually tell strangers the story of my life, but somehow the way you looked out of your eyes and a something in your voice and our going to housekeeping together and all made me spill over. I am very sorry, sir! I realize now how I must have bored you."

"Oh, but you didn't at all. You interested me intensely. I do trust you," he declared, smiling in her eyes until she smiled into his and the tears went back to whence they came. "I will tell you about myself if you want to know but I don't know where to begin."

That was very simple, the little girl thought.

"At the beginning, of course, the way I did.

I told about the studio and my first father and mother."

"All right then, but when the porter gets to our section we must stop talking and go to bed."

"Begin!" she commanded, her eyes shining in anticipation. "Tell about your home first and then your mother and father and sisters and brothers."

"My home is, at least has been, beautiful. I did not know how beautiful until I left it and saw other places similar to it that have been kept up. My father doesn't take much interest in such things and neither did my grandfather before him. It was some way-back ancestor who planned it. Some day I hope to restore it. The place is called The Hedges, because it has a hedge all around the yard. Then there is a sunken garden with another hedge around it. That sunken garden is where I used to play when I was a little chap; and my mother would sit and sew and read and watch me play. There is a fountain with a marble boy holding up a shell, and a stone basin all bordered with moss and ferns. The beds are full of flowers that come up year after year and grow of themselves. I used to keep them weeded but since I have been off to college I fancy my mother and sister have looked after them. There is a sun-dial too,

and lovely roses and box bushes that are as big as trees."

"Oh, I know you must love it!"

"I do," he answered simply. "I think I love it more than any spot on earth. I have not seen it for four years, as I have not gone home for the holidays. Next to the garden I love the attic at home. It is so quiet up there and so peaceful. My mother and I feel the same way about both of those places. My mother is wonderful, and I have a sister named Betsy, who is a darling girl, and a little brother named Jo, who was a fine youngster when I left home four years ago. He must be a great big boy by now, about fourteen, I think."

"You love your mother and sister and brother a whole lot, don't you?"

"I do indeed!"

"Then I am afraid, 'reasoning by elimination,' as Daddy used to say, that your father is the only one you do not love. You needn't blush so. I'm never going to tell anybody. You said in the beginning that you didn't adore all of your people."

"The truth is my father and I have never understood each other very well. I wanted an education and he didn't see the use of one and we were always pulling against each other

because of it. My mother was on my side and we won out but after a long hard fight. And now that I have my degree at college I must go back and work on the farm to pay for it all."

"Do you mind much?"

"Well, I can't say I am hilarious over the prospect but I do want to see my mother and be some help to her. I have known all the time the day of reckoning was coming and now that it has come I am resigned. The farm is needing me too. My father is apt to leave things very much in the hands of the colored people on the place."

"Do you like colored people?" asked the girl. "I have known so few of them myself I don't know whether I like them or not but Daddy said I must try to like them because my own first father had so much feeling and sympathy for them."

"I like the good ones but the ones on our place are not very fine specimens of the race. There is an old Aunt Peachy who is evil beyond belief. She has always lived at 'The Hedges' and was my father's nurse. She and her descendants are a bad lot but it is out of the question to get rid of them. I am going to try to reform them. There is a dear old colored woman who lives across the river from us. She

and in fact all of the colored people connected with the Mill House are good. This old woman is bed-ridden — has been for twenty years — but she is more cheerful and useful than most persons who are able to be up and about. She knits and tats day and night, is always ready to give a word of friendly advice to white and black. Many times when a boy I have stolen over across the river when life at The Hedges was dark and dreary and my old friend has cheered me up and I have gone back to farm work feeling better and stronger. Her name is Aunt Pearly Gates and one of her peculiarities is she hatches chickens in her bed."

"Oh, oh! She is the one my father used to tell about. I can remember now all about it. She used to comfort him when he was young. Aunt Pearly Gates! The mere name kind of stands for the entrance to Heaven. I believe she used to belong to my grandfather in those far-off slavery times."

"Why, then you must be going to the Mill House and your grandfather is Major Robert Taylor!"

"Yes, I'm Rebecca Taylor and my father's name was Tom."

"To think of it! I used to see your father when I was sent to the Mill House on errands.

He was so kind to me and always had a pleasant word and a joke. I was nothing but a little barefoot boy and as shy as a rabbit and so afraid of Major Taylor I used to pray on the way that the old gentleman wouldn't be at home. He usually was there, however."

"Was my grandfather unkind?"

"No, not unkind, but he had a caustic wit, a little over the head of a barefoot boy. He used to look at me through his shaggy eyebrows and what intelligence I had seemed to leave me. I remember when your father left home. I was a very small chap but I remember it well, because after that being sent to the Mill House was more of a torture than ever before, as your father's going seemed to make Major Taylor's wit sharper. I did not know Mr. Tom Taylor had a child. I did hear he had married."

"It is very wonderful for you—my first traveling friend—to have known my father. I wish, somehow, you had known about me too. It is strange my grandfather didn't tell his neighbors about me. But here comes the porter to break up our housekeeping! I do hope I am going to remember to do all the things Mrs. O'Shea told me to do and to leave undone all the things she told me not to do about sleeping cars. I can't help thinking it would be better if

the porter would take those little hammocks that he hangs up next the windows and that it would be truly cruel to put babies in because they would always be bumping against the wall, and stretch them across the aisles to catch the people, who must be always falling out of the upper berths."

With which sage observation Miss Rebecca Taylor proceeded to prepare for prayers and bed.

Chapter 3

MILL HOUSE FOLKS

The Taylors of Taylor's Mill were not aristocrats, according to the Virginia ideas of aristocracy. The ladies of the family could not have joined the Society of Colonial Dames because of any distinction an original Taylor may have won, nor could they have aspired to the Daughters of the American Revolution through paternal lines, unless having ground corn for George Washington's hoe-cakes would have made them eligible to that patriotic society.

The Taylors prided themselves on not being aristocrats. At least it was a habit of the men of the family to mention it rather often — but it was a well-known fact that they had made it a rule to marry aristocrats. They had been doing it for generations. Enough blood of the princely Cavaliers had been fused into the Taylor stock to bring its average up to aristocratic par; but the present head of the family, Major Robert Taylor, carried on the Taylor traditions by insisting he was not an aristocrat.

"Just millers!" he would assert. "Nothing

but millers who live by grinding others' corn."

This statement the ladies of the family insisted was absurd. To be sure the Taylors still owned the mill and ground other persons' corn as well as their own, but the revenue obtained from the little old mill was as a drop in a bucket compared to the money made by the hub factory, across the little river from the mill, drowning with its raucous buzz saws the soft purring noise made by the ancient machinery which was still run by the splashing mill-wheel, just as it had been in George Washington's time.

While not as old an industry as the mill, the hub factory was not a recent Taylor venture. It had been in existence for almost a hundred years. An astute Taylor had not been content with merely grinding the corn belonging to other persons but had decided that the great force that lay in the little river could furnish power to turn lathes as well as millstones and the swift current could also bring the necessary logs to the factory. The machinery at the mill had not changed with time and the meal was the same as it had been in George Washington's day, coarsely ground with the taste of the corn intact. The mill had been handed down from father to son and each generation had taken

pride in the quality of the meal ground at Taylor's Mill. But the hub factory was down-to-date. Major Robert Taylor never let a labor-saving device escape him. His hubs had as good a reputation as his corn meal. No longer did they depend upon the little river to bring logs to the factory as the neighboring forests had been denuded, but a spur of the main railroad came to the door of the building and a shuttle engine puffed back and forth hauling up logs and taking off the finished hubs.

Major Taylor was considered a just man to work for, although a bit stern and uncompromising. He had a sharp tongue that made him feared by his employees, although there were times when his heart had been discovered to be kind enough. The colored hands liked him better than the white ones.

"Ol' Marse Bob, he done made me feel lak mo' kinds er monkeys than ever got in No's Awk," said Silas Johnson, who had charge of the mill, known to the whole county as "Brer Johnson." "But it don't make no min' to me. The bigger monkey he makes er me the mo' he does for my po' ol' Pearly Gates."

"Ain't it the truf?" answered his companion and assistant, Buck Jourdan.

"It looks ter me lak Marse Bob done got

sharper tongueded arter Marse Tom up an' lef' home."

"Laws-a-mussy, Brer Johnson, that were nigh on fifteen year ago. He done had time to git over his spleen. Sometimes when he comes in the mill he talks lak his gall bladder done bus' in his mouf."

"He got wuss an' mo' of it arter Miss Myra done read outen a Noo York paper that Young Marse Tom wa' daid; daid an' buried in Noo York 'thout ever sendin' his paw a line. They do say Young Marse Tom had done got married ter some furren lady an' Ol' Marse Bob had done 'sulted Young Tom time an' agin 'bout his wife, an' done tol' him never ter darken his do' an' never ter mention his wife's name ter him an' he done sint back Marse Tom's letters 'thout even openin' 'em. Th'ain't no wonder his wife didn't sen' her paw-in-law no message 'bout her husband arter all them comtumelies. Mo' 'n lakly the po' thing didn't know nothin' but Choctaw or some kinder furren talk, anyhow. Po' lady! I reckon she griebed a lot over lil' Marse Tom. He sho' wa' one lakly young man."

"He sho' wa'!" agreed Buck. "He wa' the mos' lakly er all Marse Bob an' Miss Evy's chilluns, ter my min'. Marse Spot air so glumified

an' Miss Evelyn an' Miss Myra air so proudified. Not that they ain't moughty fine folks," he hastened to add, observing an indignant gleam in the eye of Silas Johnson.

Brother Johnson chuckled. He could criticize his white folks if he had a mind to but nobody else could do it in his presence and go unscathed. He had belonged to the Taylors and all his family had belonged to the Taylors. Ever since Taylor's Mill had been grinding corn there had been a Johnson to help a Taylor. Emancipation of the negroes had meant little to him. He still belonged to the Taylors and the Taylors belonged to him. He and his old wife, Aunt Pearly Gates, lived in the same cabin they had occupied since before the war and he had charge of the mill just as he had before Virginia passed an order of secession on that day in April in '61. In the old days he had a place to live, clothes to wear and plenty of food. The only difference was that now he must pay for the food and clothes with money earned by serving the Taylors instead of just service to the Taylors.

Brother Johnson held the same contempt for the modern hub factory that his father before him had held.

"Noisy, highfalutin', bumptious place!" he

would mutter when the great buzz saws drowned the splash and whirr of his old mill.

On the mill side of the river the country remained as of old. Alders and rushes bordered the stream and the corn lands met them in an irregular, friendly line. The arched stone bridge that spanned the river immediately above the mill-dam was as old as the mill and it too seemed to have been intended by Nature to be there, so perfectly did it harmonize with its surroundings.

On the other side of the river the hub factory shrieked its down-to-dateness with shrill whistles. It flaunted its efficiency in every line of its red brick ugliness. Nature would none of it. No alders grew on the factory side of the river and a barren stretch of land divided the factory site from the pleasant farm lands beyond. On that side was a country store which had tried to keep up with the factory in modern methods but, being after all a country store, had lapsed into its original state long ago.

The factory hands, white and colored, lived in cottages and cabins dotted through the county. Major Taylor paid good wages and had no trouble in getting labor. In busy seasons a hundred men were employed in the hub factory; two men and a boy in the mill. The Taylors' farm

was in an arm of the river on the mill side, eight hundred acres as fertile as there was in a fertile county. The land rolled gently from the flat, rich river bottom, changing gradually into more decided undulations. In the distance one could see the foothills of the Blue Ridge and on clear days the mountains, blue and far away.

Mill House told, more loudly than any Taylor, that its original owner had not been of the aristocracy. Although the main part of the building had been erected at the period when colonial architecture flourished in Virginia, no colonial trace was left. No doubt the bricks had been brought from England but they had been put into place by a matter-of-fact person who had in his mind merely the building of a house with four walls, with holes left therein for windows and doors. The ceilings were low and the woodwork of the simplest, with none of the beautiful moulding which characterized most colonial homes. Each succeeding generation had added in some way to the house and the effect was on the whole pleasing. Mill House gave one an idea of comfort and plenty. Each lean-to had been built, if without architectural plan, at least with the intention of making things more comfortable for the inhabitants. Broad porches had been added from time to

time and windows opening on those porches had been cut down and made into glass doors.

Each high-born lady who had married into the Taylor family had brought with her treasures from her home—a set of Chippendale chairs, a Sheraton sideboard, a claw-foot table or the portrait of some ancestor in high stock and powdered cue. So it was that, in spite of the fact that the present head of the Taylor family, and owner of Mill House, persisted in asserting himself to be no aristocrat, he was the possessor of perhaps as fine a collection of antique furniture as could be found in Virginia.

Major Robert Taylor was showing more than his sixty-five years of age. His hair, which had been blond, was snow white. His face was lined and seamed with wrinkles; his shoulders were stooped; his back bent. He looked like a man of seventy-five or more. However, his eyes were as blue as ever they had been; his hearing was even keener; his tongue, if possible, sharper. On that morning in June he sat in his library waiting for the mail before going to the hub factory. He was a lonely soul, a bookish man who had nobody with whom he could talk books. His son, Spottswood, and his daughters, Evelyn and Myra, read when there was nothing else to do and their type of reading matter was

not the kind to appeal to the Major. Spot confined himself to the daily paper and an occasional magazine of short stories or a farmers' quarterly. Myra kept up with the continued stories in two or three magazines, and read with interest all the advertisements and articles on the subject of domestic science, although she had no occasion to use the information gained thereby, since the queen of Mill House kitchen, Aunt Testy, brooked no interference from members of the household as to her domain. Evelyn was deeply religious and read only books of devotion or stories about missionaries and their travels and trials in foreign lands.

Young Master Tom, who had gone to New York to be an artist, had liked the kind of books the Major liked. He had been a reader from the time he was a little lad spelling out the titles on the fine old calf bindings. Spottswood was cut out for a farmer and the eight hundred acres of fertile land in the arm of the little river would keep him busy enough. But Tom — Tom might have done wonders with the hub factory, thought the Major, as he waited for the mail on this June morning. It would have grown under his clear-headed management, grown into a great industry, and yet there would have been time for reading at home in the evenings, read-

ing and long, intimate talks about the books. Tom had a sense of humor and a ready wit and could come back with clever repartee. But these other children—good enough in their way, but with no idea of a joke! It was hardly worth while teasing them, they took life so seriously.

Once Tom had failed to see through his father's grim humor; at least that was how the old man chose to think of the stand he had taken when Tom wanted to go to Paris and study art. It was merely a joke when he sent back his son's letters unopened after the news came that Tom was married. Tom should have known it was a joke and sent them back or written them again—done something besides just remain silent. He should have brought his wife down to the Mill House and let his people see her. He might have known his father would have come around. How could he have been so dense? Did he expect a man of his father's age and temper to be the one to eat humble pie? Why need he have chosen a foreigner to fall in love with? Why hadn't he married a girl in his own county and settled down at the Mill House? There was plenty of room there and if there wasn't it would have been an easy matter to build another L to the old house as his fathers before him had done.

Tom might have had a family, thought the Major. It would have been rather pleasant to have some grandchildren to whom he might leave his money. Spot seemed to have no idea of marrying, and as for Evelyn and Myra—they were old maids from the time they were born! They were handsome enough, with their yellow hair and fair skin—all the Taylors were fair—but suitors were slow to come to the Mill House or the ladies were too particular. Major Taylor had an idea that neither one of his daughters had ever had a proposal of marriage. He freely bantered them because of their lack of admirers. He wondered that it should be the case. Taylors had always married, and married well. It never entered his mind that his own caustic wit and teasing tongue had kept possible admirers away.

"Mail late, as usual!" stormed the Major, standing out on the porch where his daughters sat at opposite sides, as far apart as they could get from one another, Myra studying the intricacies of a fireless cooker advertised in the back of her magazine and Evelyn reading a religious paper.

"Not on speaking terms again, eh?" he questioned, noticing the ladies were not seated in a conversational circle. "Why don't you girls

fight it out and not go around peeved and silent? What is your grouch, anyhow? Not speaking to me, either?"

Myra cleared her throat and tried to answer, but was evidently overcome with embarrassment. Evelyn's eyes filled with tears and she put on the martyred expression which always irritated her father beyond endurance.

"It is nothing, Father," Myra finally managed to say. "Evelyn and I had a disagreement about a small matter—"

"I'll be bound it was small!"

"I didn't say a word to Myra—" put in Evelyn.

"Of course not! You never do say a word, just sulk. Fancied grievances! Lack of occupation!"

"I am sure I did not do or say anything unladylike, anything Evelyn could have taken exception to," said Myra in her most refined voice.

Major Taylor laughed ironically. "Unladylike! By Gad! I'd like to see one of you do something unladylike—something that showed you had some red Taylor blood in your veins and not just the over-refined skimmed blue milk you got from your mother's side of the house. You have the Taylor color to your hides and

hair, but you stop right there. Red blood! Red blood! You haven't an ounce of it."

Since the Misses Taylor both prided themselves on the very thing with which their father was twitting them, his statement did something towards restoring their good humor. A silent truce was declared by a mere lifting of aristocratic eyebrows. Their disagreement had been over a trivial cause; indeed, it was difficult to remember what it had been.

"The postman at last!" exclaimed their father. "Here! You imp of Satan!" he called to the crown of a hat and end of a hoe he descried at the top of the high, clipped garden hedge. "Come here!"

The hat promptly disappeared, but the end of the hoe handle still protruded above the garden hedge.

"Don't hide from me! Come here, I say, you imp of Satan! What's that little devil's name? So many darkeys on this place I can't remember their names."

"That's Willie Bell, I think," said Evelyn.

Willie Bell, being discovered, came forward from behind the hedge to report to the master of whom he was in awe.

"Go get the mail from that fool postman. Here, take these letters to him and bring back

the ones he gives you! Don't you drop a one! Do you understand?"

"No, sah! Wha' he?"

"There he is, idiot, coming down the road."

The mail carrier could be heard long before he could be seen, as his dilapidated car made more noise than a motorcycle. He was in sight now, coming along the red clay road that cut the peaceful green of the rolling meadow lands, sharply defining the contour of the hills.

Willie Bell hitched up his trousers, that were sketchily hung on his meager frame by means of a piece of twine, and timidly took the packet of letters to be mailed. Then he turned and ran like a rabbit towards the yard gate.

The Major laughed. "A pretty good little nigger, that! Comes of good stock—Johnson stock. He may some day have charge of the mill. The Johnsons seem to be keener on the perpetuation of the species than we Taylors."

Evelyn and Myra raised their eyebrows again. They wished their father wouldn't mention such things. They also devoutly hoped he would not start in on the fact that they were not doing their part towards keeping the race of Taylors going. It was up to Spottswood, anyhow, but as far as they knew Spot had no idea of having another lean-to added to Mill House. Spot was

a quiet, mirthless person who attended to his farming. He seldom mingled in the society of the county families. His sisters bored him intensely, and he, in turn, irritated them by his carelessness in dress and disregard to the niceties of life.

As they sat waiting for Willie Bell to bring the mail, Spot approached. He was a handsome young giant with the golden Taylor hair and blue, blue eyes, but his mouth was sullen and his expression discontented.

Above all things, Spottswood dreaded being corrected and being made game of. His sisters were constantly doing the first and his father seldom addressed a remark to him that the young man did not feel had a latent sting of humor.

"There's a scraper, Spot," suggested Myra, looking meaningly at his shoes caked with clay and pointing to the old iron scraper on the lower step of the porch.

Spot said nothing, but looked even more sullen and sank down on the lowest step.

"We have just been discussing the propagation of the species," said Major Taylor, looking appreciatively at his son's manly proportions, disclosed to good advantage in a loose blue chambray shirt open at the throat, and khaki

trousers. "I was saying that Silas Johnson and his descendants have done much more for their country than we Taylors. By Gad! If I had a grandchild I'd leave it everything I possess. I don't see what is the matter with the bunch of you. Effete, aristocratic blood has been diluting our good miller's stock for generations. Here I was, the only child of my parents. To be sure, I managed better than my immediate forbears, but what good did it do to have four children if it stops right there? You girls are over thirty, and Spot, here, is twenty-four. What is the matter with the men and the maids? Where are the county beaux and belles? Is nobody good enough for the likes of you, or is everybody too good?"

Myra and Evelyn looked shocked and uncomfortable during this tirade and Spot became more sullen. He wanted to marry, meant to marry some day, but up to that time had seen no one who appealed alike to him and to his family. When his father died he intended to suit himself in a wife, and she would not be any highfaluting, prissy person whom his sisters would choose, but some farmer's daughter who would not be forever insisting upon his mending his manners! He had his eye on just such a girl—little Betsy Bolling, whose home, "The

Hedges," was just across the river. She was young yet, only eighteen, but by the time he was ready for her she would be the right age. Spot knew very well, in spite of the Major's bluff assertion concerning the mistake of the Taylors having allied themselves with the aristocracy, that he would not accept for a member of his family one whose birth was not in accordance with the family traditions.

The Major's observations concerning the barrenness of his offspring were cut short by the return of Willie Bell with the mail. The little darkey was quite weighed down with the magazines and pamphlets and parcel post packages.

"The writ letters is tied up on the imside er that there maggotzine," he said, handing all the mail to his master.

"Here's a nickel for not dropping any," said the Major. "Be sure to grow up and marry and have a big family, so some of them can run the mill for me when old Uncle Si is dead."

"Yessah! Much obleeged, sah!"

The boy gave a hitch to his twine suspenders and slipped around the house, glad to escape without further bantering.

The Major sat down and began leisurely sorting the mail. He knew perfectly well that his daughters were eagerly waiting to see if there

was anything for them; he knew that Spot had his team tied to the side fence and had come in from the fields not to rest, but to get his mail, but nothing would hurry him. It was too delightful to tease this stolid family of his.

"Um humm! A letter for Myra! I'll be bound it is from that patent dust-pan agent. Perhaps he is coming a courting. A magazine for Evelyn with a recipe for serving up missionaries hot and tasty! Another letter for Myra! I bet it's a bill. Here's something for Spot—not from a lady, Spot. They won't write to you unless you write to them."

As he turned over the letters he came upon one for himself in an unknown handwriting. It was written in violet ink on salmon pink paper and smelled of musk.

"See! The ladies write to me whether I do to them or not. I wonder from whom this is. Special delivery stamp, too!"

His daughters let their own mail lie unopened, so interested were they in their father's letter. He saw their excitement and deliberated wickedly before opening it.

"Postmarked New York! I wonder who can be writing me from New York! Sent two days ago! What do I tell you about that postman? He is simply outrageous about keeping mail

back. I should have got this yesterday. I am going to write to Washington concerning his delinquency."

Major Taylor fingered the envelope curiously, looking slyly at his daughters, who could not conceal their interest in the salmon pink, highly scented letter. Even Spot looked up from his paper with some show of curiosity. The old man started to open it and then put it aside, a teasing smile on his face. He picked up the other mail and went on examining it leisurely.

"I fancy that letter is from some lady who has known me in former years. How would you children like a stepmother?"

Myra and Evelyn looked shocked and uneasy and Spottswood opened his eyes wide in astonishment. Could their father be joking? It was quite possible he might do such a foolish thing if only to tease his family.

The Major was enjoying himself.

"You need not worry," he laughed. "I am particular. I would not marry anybody who would marry me—certainly not a lady who wrote on such vile-smelling pink paper."

He waited until his family settled themselves to their various mail and then with a great rustling and rattling began opening the offensive letter. They were all attention in a mo-

ment. He finally drew out of the envelope the folded sheet.

"What's all this? I must be seeing wrong! I know my glasses need changing. Here, Spot, read this to me! No, you, Myra, you do it! Spot mumbles so."

The letter was addressed to Major Robert Taylor and this is what Myra read:

Dear Sir: I take my pen in hand to inform you that your granddaughter, Rebecca Taylor, is now left alone in New York without money and with nobody of repute, save myself, to do for her. I am a lone widow and do not feel that I can take upon myself the care of a young girl.

In looking over the letters and papers found in a trunk which belonged to the child's father I discovered your existence. In case you are dead I gathered from said letters that there are others of your name whose duty it will be to care for Rebecca.

Rebecca is a good child, although she has had no attention paid to her manners except by your humble servant. I have tried to make her behave ladylike. She is leaving New York to-morrow night and will arrive at O—— Court House Thursday morning.

No more from yours at present.

Lilburn O'Shea.

As Myra finished reading there was perfect silence on the porch.

Finally Evelyn said: "Of course this is some impostor!"

"Of course!" assented Myra.

"It's the biggest hoax I ever heard of," put in Spottswood.

"What day is this?" asked Major Taylor.

"This is Thursday?" answered Myra.

The Major reflected for a moment.

"Well, whoever this Rebecca is, she must have arrived at the Court House long before this. There will be no one to meet her, so perhaps she will get on the train and go back to New York. I must say I would like to have a look at the person."

Major Taylor was endeavoring to appear calm and indifferent, but his hand was trembling as he reached out for Mrs. O'Shea's letter. Could Tom have had a child after all? Of course not? It was some scheme of the O'Shea person to get money from him. Funny, though, that she had not mentioned money at all. That would come later on. Suppose it turned out to be Tom's daughter! Things went dim before the old man's eyes for a moment. It couldn't be possible. Tom would have told him if he had had a child. Perhaps he had! Perhaps

the news had been in one of those letters he had returned unopened!

"My God!" he gasped. "What a fool I have been!"

His daughters usually made a pretext of agreeing with him to keep the barbed arrows of his wit from being sent their way, but when the arbitrary old man declared himself a fool they felt perhaps it would be better to combat his statement.

"Not at all, Father!" they chorused.

"A fool, I say! All kinds of a fool! Don't contradict me! I know a fool when I see one. Get the bay mare hitched to my buggy. I'll go to meet this person myself. Hurry! Hurry!"

"There's someone coming down the road now, Father," said Evelyn. "Look! There are two persons — one a man and the other either a child or an old woman. Can you see them?"

"Certainly! My eyesight is as good as yours. Never mind my buggy yet a while, Spot. I'll await our guests here on the porch."

Chapter 4

REBECCA ASKS REFERENCES

From the porch at Mill House the Taylors watched the two figures, one a man, the other either a child or a little old woman, as they made their way along the winding red road. At times they disappeared as the road dipped below a hill and then they would come to view again, after each disappearance looming up a little larger and more distinct to the watchers on the porch.

"The man is young," whispered Evelyn to Myra, "and he is dressed like a gentleman. I am sure he is not a peddler."

"A suitor, perhaps!" suggested her father, ironically. The old man was numb with a kind of intense excitement, but he could still find his tongue and use it to the undoing of his daughters.

"The person with him is an old woman. Look at her mourning veil! It hangs way down over her shoulders," commented Myra. "They say it is bad form to wear such deep mourning nowadays, even for widows!"

"Perhaps this person is doubly widowed," said Evelyn.

"Look, her dresses are short, almost to her knees!" Myra exclaimed as the two figures stood for a moment at the summit of the last little hill before reaching the yard gate.

"Quite shocking!" cried Evelyn.

Spot had made no comments as he watched with his family. His wits were slow, but he realized that something was by the way of happening at Mill House, something that was going to have a bearing on the fortunes of the family.

As Philip Bolling and his little companion approached Mill House, after entering the yard gate, Major Taylor, his son and two daughters arose from their seats and stood in frozen silence. They might have been posing for a photograph of a family group on the front porch, so stiff and ill at ease did they appear. Spottswood, who had been seated on the low step, was in the foreground in the sun, the others back in the shadow of the porch.

The fact that the little old woman had turned out to be a child did not make them burst into laughter as it had Philip on the night before in the sleeper. Nobody felt like laughing. Even Major Taylor's grim humor failed to assert

itself. All of them gazed at the child, whose many parcels began slipping from her arms as she stood, her great brown eyes glued to Spottswood, whose yellow hair was shining in the sun.

"Father! Father!" she cried. "I—I—didn't know!" She started towards him and then stopped. "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. I thought—just for a moment—you seemed to be my father. You see the last time I remember him he was in a blue painting smock with the light from the skylight in the studio turning his hair to gold. I see now I was mistaken."

Spottswood looked at her in sullen silence. Her mourning bonnet had slipped to the back of her neck. Her black hair was in great disorder, as the child had never before tried to comb and brush it, that being Mrs. O'Shea's duty. She presented a strange appearance to her kinspeople as she stood before them. She looked from one to the other, shrewdly taking in the hostile attitude of her aunts, whose relationship to herself she partly divined, and then she fixed her attention on her grandfather. She fancied she saw encouragement in his expression.

Major Taylor's heart was behaving strangely. It was beating like a trip hammer and there was something in his throat that bade fair to

turn into a sob unless he could swallow it. Could this little elfin creature belong to him? She certainly did not in the least resemble any Taylor that he had ever seen. The Taylors were a stalwart race and as blond as blond could be. There had never been a dark-eyed one in the family that he had known of, although he had heard his father say his grandmother had been a brunette.

The Major looked quizzically from the child to her companion, who stood hat in hand, apparently considering the business in hand to be none of his affair. Although his father's farm was just across the river from Mill House, Philip Bolling's acquaintance with his neighbors had been of the slightest. As a boy he had occasionally been sent to Mill House on an errand, but he had not been there for years, and he realized that he was not recognized by any of them. Little Rebecca had awakened his deepest sympathies and he was determined to see her through her difficulties — even to take her home with him if her own family would have none of her, but he felt it wisest to play the role of casual bystander until the Taylors declared themselves. Although his acquaintance with them was slight, he was well aware of the peculiarities of the Mill House folks. Every-

body in the country knew of the grim, caustic wit of the old man and the pride of the daughters of the house and the stolid slowness of Spottswood. The Taylors were important persons, and no matter how much they might hold themselves aloof from their neighbors, their neighbors always managed to know much more about them and their affairs than they relished having known.

Philip remembered as a boy how he had hated to go to Mill House with a message, how the master had always made him feel small and uncomfortable, addressing him with a pretense of politeness, but plainly letting him understand his inferiority. The Taylors' conviction of their own superiority did not at all worry Philip Bolling, the man. If he had not felt so sorry for his little traveling companion he would have been amused by the present situation, but concern for her was uppermost in his mind just now.

"To what fortunate circumstance do we owe this visit?" asked Major Taylor, who had managed to swallow the sob and assume his usual sarcastic manner. "Won't you be seated?"

"No, I thank you," answered Philip, quietly. He had none of the feeling of the little barefoot boy with a message from his father about the

harvesting. "I am Philip Bolling, the son of Rolfe Bolling—"

"The devil you are!"

"I met this young lady on the train and since she was traveling alone and nobody met her at the Court House I have given myself the pleasure of bringing her safely to her destination. We came over from the Court House on the shuttle engine to the hub factory and walked from the mill. The rest of your granddaughter's baggage is at the mill, left in care of Silas Johnson."

"Whose granddaughter? What granddaughter? How am I to know this is my granddaughter? How am I to know you are the son of Rolfe Bolling?"

"That's as you choose, sir," answered Philip, respectfully, but with an indifference that made the old man open his eyes.

"And I choose to ask you what business you have bringing to my house a young person who claims to be my granddaughter when I know nothing about her and—"

"Exactly!" put in the Misses Taylor, glad of the cue from their father.

Spottswood merely gave a noncommittal "Humph!"

"Excuse me, sir, but you are mistaken in

blaming this kind young gentleman for my appearance," cried Rebecca, running past Spottswood up the steps and looking Major Taylor squarely in the eye and all but shaking her fist in his face. "I never saw him until last night, when I went to housekeeping with him on the sleeping car. He was good to me when I was lonesome, having just lost my last stepfather and no one left in the studio. He gave me his lower berth, too, not that I wanted it at all, except that it was kind of difficult to kneel down outside of an upper berth to say one's prayers, and Mrs. O'Shea has told me time and again it is not ladylike to hump up in bed and pray, and I saw no other way to do it. Thanks to Mr. Bolling, I was able to kneel quite devoutly in the aisle. I might just as well have saved my breath, as I was praying that whatever kinspeople I had left in Virginia would be glad to have me come and live with them."

Here Rebecca paused for breath and stood up very straight, her dark eyes flashing their scorn of whatever kinspeople she might have.

"I don't know whether you are my grandfather or not, and what's more, I don't care. In New York there is a home for stray cats and dogs and before they let anybody take one of them away to give it a home that person has to

give references and prove that he is a good person to cats or dogs and will be kind to it. Anybody that gives me a home has got to give references."

Major Taylor burst out laughing. His daughters looked shocked and Spottswood listened in amazement to the baiting his father was getting from this little waif.

Philip Bolling smiled. He remembered what the little girl had told him of the rules her Daddy had made her obey, one of them not to sass old folks *until* they first sassed her.

The little girl smiled, a bit uncertainly.

"It is funny, isn't it?" Now Rebecca laughed, too. "The joke's on me. I can see it. My Daddy, that is my last stepfather, used to tell me if you could see that the joke was on you and laugh at it, before long you could turn it on the other fellow. I'll tell you good-bye," and she gave a sweeping bow, taking in all the group on the porch.

"Where are you going?" asked Major Taylor.

"I am not sure what my movements will be for the next few days," she answered with a primness copied from Mrs. O'Shea, "but for the time being I am going to find Aunt Pearly Gates' house, as I am anxious to see whether

she still hatches chickens in her bed, the way my first father used to tell me she did."

A change came into the old man's face. All of the hard lines softened and into his keen blue eyes there crept an expression of infinite longing. Up to that moment he had been almost sure the strange little gypsy-like child was none of his blood. No Taylor could be so dark-eyed and different looking from all other Taylors. When she had laughed and declared the joke was on her, he had seen something that in a way had reminded him of his boy Tom, but then he argued that he had been looking for traces of his boy and it would be easy to fool him.

As for Rebecca's thinking Spot was her father, that was too stagy to be impromptu. But this remark about Aunt Pearly Gates and her hatching chickens in her bed—the conviction of the girl's being of his own flesh and blood came to him like a flash. How could he ever have doubted it? What was mere color of hair and eyes? Even shapes of noses and mouths didn't count for much in heredity compared to a certain spirit that it was possible to hand down.

That was his boy Tom who had been speaking, his Tom who had so boldly stood up for the young Bolling chap who had befriended the little waif on the journey, his Tom who had

demanded a reference instead of giving one. By Gad! He was to prove himself her grandfather instead of having her prove herself his granddaughter! He laughed aloud in his glee. He laughed and held out his hands to her.

Not seeing the change in the old man's face or his outstretched hands, Rebecca had turned and started down the steps. She held her head high and on her face was a look of determination not to show her feelings to those persons on the porch. She gave Philip Bolling a little wan smile and stooped to pick up the parcels that had slipped from her arms when she first saw Spottswood. As she stooped, a great wave of physical weakness came over her and she crumpled up in a little, bedraggled black heap.

"Now I am dying!" was the thought that came to her as she fainted, "but Mrs. O'Shea won't be here to attend to this funeral."

Chapter 5

AUNT TESTY TAKES CHARGE

"It's because she hasn't eaten any breakfast," said Philip, leaning over and picking up the little creature who seemed no bigger than a stray kitten. "I got breakfast for her at the Court House, but she was too excited to eat."

"No breakfast! May the Lord have mercy on my soul!" cried Major Taylor. "Here, Myra; you, Evelyn, don't stand there like two pop-eyed fools! Go have Testy make waffles. Cook some roe-herring and broil a squab. Didn't you hear this young man say my granddaughter is hungry? She has eaten no breakfast! Go telephone for the doctor, Spot! I never saw such a dumb lot of fools in my life. Here Mr. Bolling, bring my granddaughter into the chamber."

"Wouldn't it be better to take her to the room over the back parlor, Father?" suggested Myra, who had a certain respect for "the chamber," it being the room in which her father spent much of his time. In many of the old homes in the South there is a bedroom on the first floor where

the mother and father sleep and which is always known as "the chamber."

"Room over the back parlor! What? That hot hole, when she is ill and starving? No, missy, I'll put my granddaughter where I please and that will be the chamber. You go tell Testy to cook up a big breakfast and see that it is here in a minute," and the Major led the way to his sanctum.

"If you won't consider it an interference, I will suggest that you merely bring the child some bread and milk," said Philip, smiling in spite of himself at the picture of cooking waffles and broiling squabs, which no doubt were still in the pigeon-house, and getting it all done in a minute for a poor little girl who had fainted from exhaustion and lack of nourishment, combined with the excitement of being scorned and ignored by her kinsmen.

She lay quite limp in his arms. He placed her on the bed in the chamber, taking the battered bonnet from her neck and drawing off the dusty little shoes.

Myra and Evelyn had hastened to do their father's bidding and Spot could be heard in the hall at the telephone giving the doctor's ring—two long and a short.

"What must we do? What must we do?

Speak, young man! Is she going to die? Why don't they bring that bread and milk? I never saw a little child faint like this. I believe she is already dead and it is I who have killed her. Oh, what an old fool I am!"

Considering Robert Taylor had spent sixty-five years in perfect conviction that he was very wise and always right, it was a strange thing that in one morning he had twice acknowledged himself to be a fool.

"She is not going to die, I am sure," consoled Philip. "There, now she is opening her eyes!"

Open them she did for a moment, but the lashes seemed too heavy for the weary lids and again they rested on the pale cheeks. A sigh escaped from the cold lips. It was hard to have to come back to consciousness and not be dead, after all. But what was that good smell? She sniffed daintily.

"Wha' 'bouts air the po' critter?" asked Aunt Testy as she came waddling in, carrying a small tray.

"Well, bless Bob, if she ain't a layin' up in ol' Marster's baid! Here, honey baby, here's a lil' bite er sumpin' fer yer. What all this I hearn 'bout you ain't et no brekfus? I done briled a bit er bacin, sliced as thin as thin, an' I

jes' that minute done tuck a pone er bisit bread out er the oben. It air the kinder bread Marse Tom useter call dog bread, an' he fairly doted on it. It air jes lak the bisit cep'n it ain't cut out — an' sometimes when the folks is all through the dogs gits it."

Rebecca opened her eyes again and her delicate nostrils quivered perceptibly. Philip Bolling whispered something to Major Taylor and the two men tip-toed into the hall, leaving the door open.

"See her pretty nose a wuckin'! That air the odium er the bacin. I allus 'lows the smell er briled bacin will raise the daid. Open yo' mouf, honey chile, an' let Testy put a sup er nice milk in it."

Rebecca raised herself on her elbow a moment and looked eagerly in the good-natured, fat face of Aunt Testy.

"Are you Aunt Old Testament or Aunt New Testament?" she asked eagerly.

"I'm New Testymunt. My maw befo' me wa' Ol' Testymunt," answered Aunt Testy, amazement depicted on her moonlike countenance. "What you know 'bout Ol' Testy an' New Testy, honey chil'?"

While she talked the old woman slipped a sup of milk in the child's mouth.

"My father used to tell about you," whispered Rebecca. "You and Aunt Pearly Gates. Gee, but this milk is good!"

"Yo' paw?"

"Yes, I guess he was the Marse Tom you spoke of, but we mustn't talk about that. Nobody believes me and I am going away back to New York. I'm very sorry I threw that fit. I guess it was a fit, and I wasn't dying after all, but somehow if I had died and waked up in Heaven it might have been just like this: all of the hard, hating faces gone, and a sweet, fat brown angel looking at me so kindly and bringing me milk. Where's the honey, Aunt New Testament?"

"What honey, chil'?" Aunt Testy was trying hard not to cry.

"The honey that goes with the milk! In Heaven the honey always flows with the milk. I'm going to pretend like, just for a few minutes until I get alive again, that I am dead and in Heaven. You won't mind pretending you are my good angel, will you, Aunt New Testament?"

"No, baby!" sobbed Aunt Testy. "An' I'll git my ol' man ter rob them bee hibes if'n you kin wait three shakes."

"Never mind," smiled Rebecca. "We can

just pretend the honey along with the wings. This bacon makes me think maybe we are in Heaven really. Are you quite sure we aren't, Aunt Testy? This bed might be downy clouds."

She bounced up and down gently in the great four-poster. In doing so, her slim little feet came to her notice.

"I see I have lost my shoes on the way to Heaven, but I have the same hole in the toe of my stocking that I started with. I'd hate to think I had to take the holes to Heaven. They are kind of like bad habits and should be left behind. What do you think about that, Aunt Testy?" and Rebecca carefully picked up every crumb of the good bread.

"Sister Pearly Gates kin answer them there questions better'n what I kin. She am mo' sanctified an' kin profoun' the scriptures mo' clarer than mos' preachers. You had better arsk her."

"Then you can tell me where she lives. I am going to see her before I go back to New York. I think it is a kind of pity to come so far and not see the wonders of the neighborhood, don't you Aunt Testy?"

"Sho', chil', but you ain't a gonter go off! We all wants you right here at Mill House."

"Maybe *you* do, Aunt New Testament, but

the others—the old man and the young one and the two ladies, they hate me. I came here thinking they were my relations and I was their poor kin, but I have made some kind of mistake. They can't be of the same blood as my father, although the young man looks like him. Why, Aunt Testy, my father was the kindest, gentlest person in the world. I can only just remember him, because I was so tiny when he died, but I remember very well he was always laughing and his laugh was sweet like singing. I can remember more about my father than I might have because my last stepfather, Daddy, I called him, was always telling me things about my truly father. Daddy was the one who knew about Aunt Pearly Gates and you and Aunt Old Testament, because my father had told him. He said he didn't want me to forget my father and what a wonderful person he was."

"Lawd love us! Now, ain't it the truf? But, honey baby, you air a gonter stay right here an' tell me an' ol' Marse Bob all about yo' paw an' yo' step paws."

Aunt Testy could see the master through the open door and he was signaling for her to try to please Rebecca. The darkey could tell by his expression that he was deeply concerned, and the coming of this grandchild had meant

more to him than anything since his little Tom was born. Testy knew Major Taylor's roughness and his kindness, his hard spots and his soft spots. She had not cooked at Mill House for thirty years for nothing. She had been introduced into the mysteries of the master's kitchen when she was twenty years old, Aunt Old Testament being in charge, and now she was a middle-aged woman and her mother was dead and the master an old man. Tom, Myra, and Evelyn had been little children when she had come, a shy, slim, brown girl, to learn the art of cooking under her mother. She had been with the family when the wife and mother had died, and later on when Tom had gone off to study painting in New York, thereby infuriating his father to such an extent that he had returned his son's letters unopened. She was with them when the terrible news of Tom's death was read out by one of his sisters from a New York paper. She had watched her master grow harder and more bitter as the years rolled by; had realized his disappointment in his children, his loneliness and lack of companionship.

Now this child had come and she might help matters somewhat if only the ladies of the house and the young master would be pleasant. Testy knew quite well that when it came to a test the

Major had a kinder heart than any of his children.

"He air as rockified as a coconut, but whin oncet you git through his crus' you fin' the milk er human kin'ness is thar, all right," she would declare. "But you is got ter be 'ticular 'bout how you goes ter wuck ter git that milk er you'll spill it. You got ter fin' his soft' spots same as in a coconut and then bo' in under keerful."

She was fond of Evelyn and Myra and Spottswood because they were part of the family, but she understood their limitations quite as well as their own father did. She was more lenient to their faults and quicker to see their virtues.

"The po' things is done got mo' fum they maw than fum they paw, an' they maw didn't hab none ter spare," she would say to herself when something arose in the family that called for intelligence and action, and Evelyn and Myra would begin to wrangle instead of doing and Spot would stand sullenly by.

"I am much better now, Aunt Testy, and I think I'll put on my shoes and go see Aunt Pearly Gates and then go back to New York. I'd like to see Mr. Philip Bolling and tell him good-bye and thank him for all his kindness to me."

Rebecca sat up and reached for her shoes, but again the dizzy feeling seized her and she was compelled to lie down.

"Oh! What am I to do? I don't seem to be able to get up and they don't want me to stay here. I don't want to stay here, either, although I think it is just like Heaven. I wouldn't want to stay in Heaven if I wasn't wanted."

There was a groan from the hall. The Major could control himself no longer.

"What must I do?" he asked tremblingly of Philip.

"Can't you make her understand you want her?" suggested Philip.

"But how?"

"Give the required reference," smiled the young man.

"For character, you mean?"

"Yes—and then prove you are her grandfather."

"Of course! What an ass I am, anyhow! Young man, did I understand you to say you are Rolfe Bolling's son?"

"Yes, sir!" Philip looked the old gentleman squarely in the eyes.

The Major stared back, keenly and a little wistfully, taking in his broad forehead, humorous eyes, clear-cut features, and mouth whose

characteristics were sadness, patience and strength.

"Have I ever seen you before? I did not remember Bolling had a grown son."

Philip smiled, as he answered:

"I have seen you, sir, many times. When I was a boy my father often sent me here with messages about—"

Philip hesitated, remembering that the messages were always complaints about one thing or another—the Major's cows having crossed the river and got in the Bollings' corn, or maybe a Bolling sow had strayed with her young, and when she was brought back by a Taylor servant the progeny had fallen short of the original number and the owner had written an indignant note accusing the Taylor darkey of deliberate theft and even intimating the master had been cognizant of the shortage.

In recalling those notes Philip Bolling felt himself blushing to the roots of his hair, not only because of the spirit of unneighborliness that had prompted them, but because of the badly spelled scrawls in which his father had written the sow "sough" and how Major Taylor had answered in kind bringing counter charges concerning his "c-o-u-g-h" cow.

"Yes! Yes! I remember there was a boy,"

said the Major, hurriedly. "And where have you been all these years?"

"Columbia University!"

"What have you been doing there?"

"Trying to get some education!"

"And did you?"

"I have just started. I have my M. A., but—"

"Now you have to stop?"

"I have to work on the farm. For every year of study I have promised my father a year of farm work."

Philip made the statement quite simply. Major Taylor gave a short dry laugh.

"It is comforting in a way to find out I am not the only old fool in the neighborhood," he said shortly. "But young man, would you mind if I complimented you a bit and told you that I am of the opinion you are what in breeding is known as a 'throw back'?"

Dr. Price arrived at this moment and soon pronounced Rebecca as overwrought and undernourished.

"She must rest a great deal, have plenty of fresh air and much wholesome food," was his verdict. "What have you been eating, child?"

"Crackers and tea, principally," Rebecca answered. "We had a lot of tea on hand and you

don't have to wash up after crackers, but just blow the crumbs away."

"Well, much more of that kind of food and we can just blow you away. She had better stay in bed for a few days, Major Taylor," the doctor said. "Is she to remain in this room?"

"Hardly!" exclaimed Myra and Evelyn in one breath. "This is Father's chamber!"

The aunts had been hovering in the background until the doctor arrived and then they had come forward. The poor ladies were at a loss as to what was expected of them. They had taken their cue from their father in deciding the queer-looking little creature who had arrived so unexpectedly in their midst was not their brother's child and had not been prepared for this sudden change. They were determined to go on in their assumption that Rebecca was an impostor. For once they were of one mind, and they knew instinctively that their brother agreed with them. He had telephoned for the doctor at his father's command, but had done it with a poor grace, and on his handsome countenance an expression of sullen unconcern.

"Oh! I mustn't stay in this room, then," said Rebecca, sitting up in the great bed and trying not to let the dizzy feeling get the better of

her. "I can travel back to New York in a few minutes, I am sure. Can't I, doctor?"

The doctor was puzzled.

"I understood from your grandfather that you were to live here with him."

Rebecca said nothing, but slowly turned her eyes, looking in turn at each person standing around her bed. The countenances of the aunts registered coldness and dislike; the young uncle, who was in the background, showed a kind of sullen rage; Aunt Testy was wiping the tears from her kindly fat face.

Dr. Price tried to appear impersonal, realizing that he had put his foot in a family affair, but his pleasant eyes gave back a sympathetic gleam as his little patient looked at him. Turning to Philip Bolling, Rebecca read trust and encouragement in his face. He gave her a nod and a smile. Still sitting bolt upright in the great four-posted bed, the girl now bent a level gaze on her grandfather, who was leaning forward as though hungrily waiting for her inspection of the other persons in the room to be finished and for his time to come. The Major met her look squarely and for a few seconds young brown eyes looked into old blue ones. What brown eyes saw in blue and what blue eyes saw in brown no one in the room could divine, but

suddenly, without the least warning, old man and young girl began to laugh. The laugh proved their kinship.

Evelyn and Myra were plainly shocked. They were accustomed to their father's going off in sudden chuckling fits at what seemed to them solemn or distressing moments. They had been forced to put up with what they considered his misplaced fun, and now here was this terrible child behaving in the same unaccountable manner. What was there to laugh about?

"That's better!" announced Dr. Price, putting his stethoscope back in his black satchel. "I reckon this little lady will soon be on her feet. Mind now, plenty of fresh air and nourishing food, no more crackers and tea, and I shouldn't advise a railroad journey for some time to come."

"Might I have the room my father used to have?" asked Rebecca. "That is, if I am to stay?"

Philip Bolling and the doctor, who were friends of long standing, went off together, both of them evidently entirely satisfied with the turn affairs had taken at Mill House.

"It will be the salvation of old Bob Taylor if he can keep the child," Dr. Price said to Philip as they sped away in the doctor's little

car. "The old man is almost bored to death with his wooden-headed daughters. I don't envy the girl, however. It is a terrible thing to cope with humorless fools."

Chapter 6

IN AUNT PEACHY'S REALM

The Hedges was a perfect specimen of colonial architecture, red brick with pillared portico and deep cornice of beautiful proportion and workmanship. Every detail had been carefully considered by the builder. The windows and doors were not mere holes in the walls but decorative spaces whose size, shape and position were of paramount importance to the architectural effect. The finished whole had been beautiful, but that beauty had largely disappeared through the vandalism of paint that generations of Bollings had imposed upon their ancestral home. The mellow pink of the old brick had been spared, but wherever there was wood, as in the cornice, blinds and pillars of the portico, paint had been applied recklessly. The crenelations of the cornice from successive coats had lost the clear cut decision that had made for beauty and were but indistinct rounded lumps. The indentations of the fluted columns of the portico had gradually been filled in.

The present owner of The Hedges had out-

done all of his predecessors in the choice of paint. The last coat that had been applied was a green that warred with the pink of the old brick and refused to be reconciled with any of the greens of Nature. In many places the paint had peeled off, disclosing the taste of former possessors, here a patch of dismal brown, there a bit of faded tan. In several places a splotch of gleaming white cried out as from the grave of better days.

The grounds, which had been as well laid out as any in the Old Dominion, had suffered from neglect and ill treatment even more than the mansion. The yard of ten acres was enclosed by a mock-orange hedge which had not been clipped within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of the county, and had in consequence grown into a row of straggling trees, thorny and uncouth, but held in high favor by the birds, who could build there with impunity, the spiky branches offering protection against marauding cats and snakes. The rolling lawn had been ploughed and planted in potatoes. A small grass plot had been left around the house, not for beauty's sake but because it gave turning room for the plough horses.

The western part of the lawn was traversed by a gurgling brook which had been the delight

of the founder of The Hedges branch of the Bolling family, since it had established the site for the sunken garden, giving an opportunity for a fountain in the lower part of the yard. This sunken garden was about two hundred feet square, enclosed by a box hedge and with box bushes set formally at the corners. Tradition asserted that this garden had been the wonder of the countryside. It had been planned by an English landscape gardener and the owner had spent a fortune on its making and upkeep.

If the charming Bolling who had taken such pleasure in his garden, with its ever-changing riot of color as the seasons advanced, could have seen the sad havoc time and neglect and stupidity had played with his treasure, no doubt he would have turned over in the grave where he was lying so peacefully in the little burying ground under the great chestnut tree on the hill beyond.

The box hedge around the sunken garden had shared a like fate with the one of mock-orange that enclosed the yard. It had grown to a great height and was thick with dead wood. Rolfe Bolling had declared it was "horse high and hog strong" and had finally turned the garden into a pigpen. There was no trace now of the pretty gravel walks. Perhaps never again would the

purple and white of the iris and violet succeed the daffodil, only to give way to the red and gold of the tulip and those in turn to the blue of love-in-the-mist, cornflower and ageratum. For almost four years hogs had rooted where had bloomed snowdrop and crocus. The rose of England and the lily of France were dead. The hogs had succeeded in uprooting almost everything. One sturdy seven-sister rose had been benefited by much digging around its roots and had grown to goodly size. Clusters of tiny pink buds covered the bush as though to flaunt in the face of the porkers the superiority of seven-sisters over them.

The marble basin of the fountain had proven an ideal hog wallow. The little bronze boy who for so many years had tirelessly held aloft the shell in which to catch the pearly drops that sprayed from the simply contrived fountain had toppled over and was so covered with mud that even the hogs had lost sight of him. The sun-dial, whose fluted column had been such an excellent scratching post for razor-backs, was also prone and seemed to be awaiting burial.

To the rear of the mansion buildings that had in early days been placed out of sight and far away from the house had gradually crept closer as rebuilding had from time to time become

necessary, and now the smokehouse, corn crib, and henhouse were cheek by jowl with the great house. The cow stable and barn were close enough to give olfactory evidence of their proximity and a huge manure pile had thrust itself into the foreground of the landscape.

The Bollings were true F. F. V.'s. Not only were they among the first settlers in the new world, but the founder of the Virginia family was of noble birth. This particular branch of Bollings had settled at The Hedges in the eighteenth century. The first house had been of logs, two rooms and a loft, with an open passage dividing the rooms and huge stone chimneys on both sides of the house. Later on this house had been abandoned for the great brick mansion and the old home turned over to the slaves. It was still occupied by the numerous descendants of Aunt Peachy.

The son of that early Bolling who had taken such delight and pride in his garden had married the daughter of his father's overseer. That was in Revolutionary times, and since then it had become a habit of the sons of the house to mate beneath them socially. There had been a gradual sinking of standards through the generations until at the present time the owner of The Hedges had reached the lowest rung of the

ladder. No one could have believed that Rolfe Bolling had in his veins a drop of the aristocratic blood of the Cavaliers. He was illiterate, untidy, miserly, pugnacious. He could write with difficulty and often varied in spelling his own name. His father, who was a weak, dull man, had tried to have his son educated, but Rolfe had refused with the stubbornness which characterized him.

"Book larnin' ain't nothin' but foolishness," he had asserted in the vernacular learned from Aunt Peachy, his old colored mammy. "Readin' an' writin' don't git rid er no tater bugs, an' spellin' don't grow no craps. Th'ain't no man in this here county what kin do me out'n a nickel that he owes me, an' it don't take much 'rithmetic fer me ter know that a dollar saved is a dollar an' six cents in a year an' a dollar spent is mo'n apt ter drag some mo' along with it."

Why Elizabeth Wheeler had married Rolfe Bolling had been the wonder of the neighborhood. She was a handsome, upstanding girl who might have done better for herself. Twenty-five years had elapsed since she had come as a bride to The Hedges, and hard, bitter years they had been. At first she had tried to reform her husband's untidy habits and to correct his English, but he only laughed at her

attempts and became more slovenly in his habits and careless in his speech.

Aunt Peachy had resented bitterly and vindictively the marriage of Rolfe Bolling. She had been sole mistress of The Hedges since the death of Rolfe's mother forty years before, and she had no idea of handing over the keys to any "po' white pusson," as she designated her master's young wife. She had cared for Rolfe since he was a baby and had taken delight in spoiling the little white boy. She had encouraged him to be sly and untruthful, and had applauded his gluttony and had made him feel that he was superior to all others and that good behavior was not incumbent upon him.

Elizabeth had been reared in a clean and decent home, although it had been small and poor, and the untidy condition of The Hedges was more than she could bear, but any change was accomplished only after bitter revilings from Aunt Peachy, who was in fact still mistress of the place. Her appetite had rebelled at the coarse, greasy food, and before Philip was born Dr. Price had insisted that she be allowed to do her own cooking. Once this privilege was accorded her she held to it, although Aunt Peachy continued to cater to her master until she became so feeble she was forced to

give up active ministrations, but her place was in a corner of the kitchen behind the stove, where she sat from morning until night doing what she called "the haid work" of the household.

"Put mo' cracklin' in that there cawn pone!" she commanded Elizabeth, who was busily engaged in preparing dinner for her husband. "You's mo'n willin' ter starve my baby ter skin-an'-bone." Aunt Peachy always called Rolfe Bolling her baby, although he was a man almost seventy years old. "He wouldn't git 'nough suption in his victuals ter keep body an' soul together if it wa'n't fer his ol' mammy. You's sech a han' ter scrimpin' the grease."

Elizabeth said nothing, but put another spoonful of hog cracklings in the batter. She had long ago determined that there was no use in contending with either her husband or the old negress where small matters were concerned, but saved her energy for what she considered fundamentals, such as the rearing and educating of her children.

Aunt Peachy did not hesitate to twit her mistress with the fact that she belonged to the poor white class, and such was the old woman's influence over Rolfe Bolling that he had been known to sit by and laugh while his wife was being

insulted by the evil-tongued old negress.

Sometimes Elizabeth would stop in her work and look at the wretched old creature huddled up in the corner of the kitchen which was sacred to her and the thought would come: "Oh, Lord, how long? How long?" It would be so easy to kill her, and there were moments when she felt that the killing of the hateful old woman would be no more of a crime than putting a gnawing rat out of existence.

Aunt Peachy had a strange scuttling glide and could slip herself through an inconceivably small crack. The old woman was feeble, her energy was almost gone, but at moments she would pull herself together and suddenly dart from her chair to investigate something that was going on in another part of the house. Curiosity was her ruling passion and very little happened at The Hedges without her knowledge. By some seemingly occult power she usually managed to know what was going on in the neighborhood, too. No colored person dared come on the place without bringing her some bit of gossip. She was a power with the lower class of her own people and held them in subjection by imposing on their superstitious fears. She was supposed to work charms, and a choice morsel of news, the more scandalous the

better, insured the bearer from bad luck, if not actually bringing him good luck. Elizabeth wondered sometimes if her husband's complete subjection to his old nurse was not in a measure due to his superstitious fear of her.

Philip, the first born, had as a child been afraid of Aunt Peachy and the mother had gloried in the fact. As he grew beyond fear he had hated her as one might hate a rat or a snake. The other two children, Betsy and little Jo, had no fear of the old woman. They seemed to feel she was a huge joke, a person at whom one laughed and on whom children played tricks. Strange to say, the old woman rather enjoyed the role into which she was forced by the two younger children, who even made game of their father.

"Philip is coming home! My Philip!" kept singing in Elizabeth's heart as she prepared dinner for her husband on that morning in June. What difference did it make if Aunt Peachy did tell her to put more cracklings in the corn bread? What difference did anything make that was not connected with her Philip?

She longed for the return of her son, her first born, and she dreaded it, too — dreaded it for his sake. Life was not to be what she would have had it be for the boy. Not only did hard

manual labor await him, but gibes and bickerings. His father never let an opportunity pass to find fault with him and oppose him, not from any actual dislike he had for his son, but from a kind of jealous envy. Philip was all he had not been and in spite of the flattery of Aunt Peachy, Rolfe Bolling had sense enough to know that he had not made the best of his opportunities.

"When you 'spectin' of that there Phup?" queried Aunt Peachy, almost as though divining the thoughts of her mistress. "You cyarn't keep back from me that you is 'lowin' he'll be along soon. All this here scrubbin' an' cleanin'! It's a wonder my baby don't ketch his death with all the flo's wet with suds. I ain't nebber hearn tell er a lady bawn a gittin' down on her knees fer nothin' but prayer. Po' whites is funny folk! Ketch me a scrubbin' on my knees. I ain't nebber done it. Ol' marster ain't nebber required it er me an' as fer my baby, he'd a bit out his tongue befo' he'd arsk me ter do sich a thing. I've been known ter tie a rag roun' my foots an' wop up a flo', but I's too high bawn ter git on my knees fer man or beas'. My gret-gran'pap wa' a Afgan king what hel' hisse'f way above po' whites."

All of this in a high cackle, with never a word

from Elizabeth, who went quietly on with her cooking.

"When you say he comin'?"

"I didn't say. I don't know."

"You been a stirrin' furnisher 'roun' mighty brisk upstars lately. I 'low you's fixin' up young marster's room," putting an unmistakable sneering emphasis on "young marster."

"Yes, I have been arranging Mr. Philip's room, thinking he might arrive in the next few days."

"Mr. Phup! Yi, Yi, Yi!" she cackled. "Is you a thinkin' I's a gonter call Phup, mister? I ain't called his pap befo' him mister, an' I ain't a gonter call him mister. You can't say he's any better'n his pappy, kin you?"

Elizabeth was silent as to what she might say concerning her son's superiority to his father

"I say, kin you?" repeated the old woman, venomously. She took extreme delight in trying to make Elizabeth criticize her husband. A soft padding noise in the passage warned her her master was approaching and she raised her voice to a querulous whine.

"You's afeerd ter say. Yo' keepin' so dumb is a sho' sign you thinks Phup is better'n what his pap is. Ain't nobody gonter say a word against my baby 'thout gittin' me riled."

"Who's sayin' a word against yo' baby?" asked Rolfe Bolling, filling the doorway with his great hulk. He looked in reality like a huge fat baby except for the grizzled fringe of a two weeks growth of beard. Nature had given him handsome features with which to begin life, but overindulgence had succeeded in taking from him any claim to good looks that might have been his.

"This white ooman's a sayin' yo' own son is better'n what you is," declared Aunt Peachy.

Elizabeth had made no such statement, but she scorned to contradict the old woman, especially since she was quite sure her son was a hundred times better than his father.

"How you know he's so much better'n what I is?" demanded Rolfe, blustering like a conceited boy. "You ain't seen him for mos' fo' years. Thar ain't no tellin' what a boy will come to in that time. He sho' is spent a power of money an' I ain't a doubt that women an' drink is whar it's gone."

"Much money!" exclaimed Elizabeth scornfully. "He has had barely sufficient to keep body and soul together and has had to work very hard to make enough to buy clothes and the necessary books."

"That ain't a makin' him better'n his pappy,"

insisted Aunt Peachy. "My baby ain't nebber had ter 'pend on clothes ter make him the king bee, an' he wa'n't nebber no han' ter set aroun' showin' off with a book. 'Tain't nothin' but showin' off. It stands ter reason that all them things you folks pertends ter read out'n a book ain't thar. You air jes' a makin' up lies."

"Ain't it the truth?" laughed Rolfe Bolling. "You've hit the nail on the head that time, Mam' Peachy. What do you say to a drap o' somethin'?"

"I say, praise the Lawd!"

"Do you want yo' baby to mix up a toddy?"

"No sirree! I don't want nothin' mixed in mine. Time was when I didn't min' a lil' sugar an' water 'longside er my dram, but my ol' gullet craves jes' plain juice now. If'n you put anything in it put a dash er red pepper."

The old woman leered greedily while her master padded around the kitchen getting tin cups from the shelves and unlocking a corner cupboard, taking therefrom a brown jug which, holding to his ear, he shook tentatively.

"Gittin' powerful low! Is you been a suckin' my bottle?" he asked suspiciously.

"Laws-a-mussy, honey chil', how could ol' Peachy git in yo' closet? I ain't mo'n crawled from my room ter my cheer an' back fer over a

month now, come Sunday. P'raps some er them thar Wheelers is been a callin'."

Rolfe grunted his disapproval of whomever had been meddling with his precious jug and poured out a generous drink for Aunt Peachy and one for himself. It was well known that Elizabeth's one brother, who occasionally came to see his sister, was a strict church member and a teetotaler, but Aunt Peachy always intimated that he was responsible for any diminution in the Bolling supply of liquor. No lock was proof against her clever old fingers, and the jug of whisky might just as well have been left on the kitchen table for safety as locked in the cupboard. With a bent hairpin or a crooked nail the old woman could have picked any lock. Rolfe Bolling always locked up his jug and Aunt Peachy always stole from him what liquor she wanted.

"Liquor's harder an' harder to git," said Rolfe, as he took a great gulp from the tin cup.

Elizabeth sniffed disdainfully. The smell of the whisky was sickening to her. There had been moments in those twenty-five years of her life at The Hedges when she had felt that she would go mad and smash the brown jug. She had even had the courage to remonstrate with her husband and the old negress, trying to per-

suade them to be more abstemious, but that was in the early days. She had long since ceased to try to change their habits, but the odor still sickened her. Sometimes the thought came to her that it would be wise to encourage them and they might drink themselves to death, but the alcohol only seemed to preserve Aunt Peachy and as far as she could see did no harm to Rolfe. Certainly they were much pleasanter when they had had their dram, and it was easier to get along with both the old negress and the master when they were slightly under the influence of liquor. Elizabeth hated to have Betsy and Jo present while the jug was being passed around, and she shrank pitifully from the thought of Philip having to come in contact with it, as he surely would as soon as he came home.

Chapter 7

PHILIP'S HOME-COMING

A sound of gay chatter, followed by a peal of laughter, came from around the side of the house.

"That's that thar Betsy! Who you reckon she larfin' at now?" queried Aunt Peachy, tin cup raised to her protruding lips.

A step on the flagging! Elizabeth's heart lost a beat. A man's deep voice asking: "Where's Mother?" Then her two children standing arm in arm in the kitchen doorway!

"I walked all the way to the pike, Mother," said Betsy. "I was so sure he was coming. Here he is!"

"Mother!"

"My boy!"

Philip gave his mother one long kiss and then turned to his father, holding out his hand:

"Father, I am back."

"Humph! High time!" Rolfe Bolling shook his son's hand flabbily. There was something about Philip that made him feel uncomfortable. He tried to find the reason in his

befuddled brain. He had a vague feeling that it was because he looked strangely like one of the far-off Bolling ancestors—the one in powdered cue and high stock that used to hang in the parlor and had been discarded for a crayon portrait of more recent date. As a little boy Rolfe had been afraid of the portrait, although fascinated by it. Aunt Peachy had used his fear of it to control the child, making vague threats that "the ol' man wif his th'oat all wropped up was a gonter ketch him." Both the old negress and the little white boy believed it was this very man who had hanged himself in the attic, connecting his stock with the noose, but they were mistaken. The portrait in question was of the charming gentleman who had planned the sunken garden and was responsible for the noble proportions of The Hedges.

Philip had changed decidedly from the boy of nineteen. He had always had a certain poise in his bearing in spite of the too long legs and arms, accentuated by the too short sleeves and trousers of the country-made clothes in which he had last been seen by his family. Now, not only did his clothes fit him, but he fitted his clothes. He impressed his people as he had Major Taylor. He had the indescribable air of birth and breeding. The set of his head, turn

of his wrist, slender strong hands and well shod, shapely feet all bespoke the gentleman.

Elizabeth looked at her son with a heart full of joy and thankfulness. She felt that he would be able to cope with the difficulties that were sure to beset his path.

"Where is little Jo?" asked Philip. "I certainly do want to see the kid."

"He's not little Jo any more," said the mother sadly. "You can almost see the boy grow."

"He's off down the river fishing with Jim Strong," answered Betsy. "Jim is trying to get religion again and he says the fishermen in the Bible were holy men and maybe if he fishes enough he can come through. Jim is a silly old nigger. Jo is always running with those farm hands and it certainly doesn't improve his manners any. I do hope, now you are home, you will make him mend his ways, Philip."

Philip looked inquiringly at his mother and saw on her face a troubled look. He put his arm around her and kissed her again.

"Y'ain't kissed ol' Mam' Peachy yit," whined the old negress from behind the stove.

Philip started in surprise. The old woman had been so quiet and was crouched so low in her chair he had not been aware of her presence in the kitchen.

"Yo' pap done kissed me time an' agin when he wa' a baby, an' you ain't no better'n yo' pap. Yo' pap done set me up an' put a gol' ring on my finger."

"How do you do, Aunt Peachy?" Philip spoke pleasantly, but with a dignity that for a moment quelled the old woman's tirade, and before she could collect her wits for the tongue-lashing she meant to give the young master he turned to his mother with:

"I would have been here sooner, but I had to take a little girl over to Mill House." He told them of Rebecca's arrival and Aunt Peachy was, as usual, appeased by the thrill of joy she always experienced over a choice morsel of news.

"You mean she air Tom Taylor's gal? Lil' Tom Taylor what done lef' home whin Betsy thar wa'n't mo'n a baby? I'll be boun' thar's some lef' handed doin's or the gal would a been hyar long ago. I'm a lowin' them thar hoighty toighty Myras an Ev'lyns will rar back mo'n ever with proudified feelin's 'ca'se they ain't a gonter want ter have no upstart brat aroun' ter look arfter."

Philip ignored the old woman and went on to tell his mother of Rebecca.

"I hope Betsy and Jo can see something of

the child. They will like her, I am sure, and it will mean something to the little thing to have a friend like Betsy." He looked upon his sister with admiration and affection. Betsy had been not much older than Rebecca when he left home and now she was a grown girl, pretty beyond belief, with a complexion like a Cherokee rose and grey eyes that twinkled like waters on a starry night.

"Oh, fine!" exclaimed Betsy. "I'd like to see somebody besides the cows and the pigs and old Mam' Peachy. I won't mind a bit being older than Rebecca. I'm mortal afraid of old Major Taylor and his stuck-up daughters, but I think Mr. Spot Taylor is as handsome as a king. He took a stone out of the grey colt's foot only last Sunday, and he was as politeful as could be."

"Polite!" corrected her mother, smiling at her daughter's enthusiasm.

"But he was more than polite."

"Mind out! Mind out!" cackled Aunt Peachy. "Them Taylor men ain't ter be trusted. They has a way er lovin' low an' marryin' high. Not that the Bolling blood ain't mo' fittin' than any er that there Taylor blood. They ain't no better'n mountain po' whites ter start wif. I hates the whole passel er them. I

hates the white folks an' I hates the black folks on that side er the ribber. I hates ol' Bob Taylor, wif his teasin' skeeterish ways, an' I hates his stiff-backed cotton-topped gals. I hates that there fat Testy an' I hated her mammy befo' her. I hates that ol' fool of a Pearly Gates, a layin' up in the bed lak a queen. An' I hates her ol' fool nigger husban', Si Johnson. I ain't seed this here young Spot Taylor but oncet lately an' I reckon he air as bus'in' open wif conceit as the res' er the mess. He ain't never had no manners ter speak on. I's got plenty er hate lef' fer him, an' I's got some ter spar fer the lil' brat what air jes' come."

Aunt Peachy, with the cleverness of her type, divined at once that it annoyed Philip for her to speak of Rebecca in such terms. She leered at him impertinently, leaning over and scratching her ankle with the expression of a vindictive ape.

"Well, when Rebecca Taylor comes over to see me I hope you will mend your manners, old Mam' Peachy," laughed Betsy. "You mustn't scratch in her presence. She is a young lady from New York and it might shock her."

Aunt Peachy retorted in a shrill cackle:

"Yi! Yi! Not scratch befo' mill folks! Yi! Yi! I kin tell you-alls right here that

when I itches I scratches, wharever I is an' wharever I itches. Ain't it the truf, my baby?"

"Yes, an' befo' I git through with ol' Bob Taylor he's a gonter be hollerin' fer room to scratch," declared Rolfe Bolling, as he sank in his chair and began to eat the dinner which Elizabeth had dished up for him. Rolfe always ate in the kitchen, Aunt Peachy entertaining him with her ceaseless and scandalous chatter. Elizabeth had from the very beginning insisted upon having her meals with her children in the dining room.

"There's Jo now!" cried Betsy. "A string of catfish! You needn't expect me to clean 'em and fry 'em."

"Nobody's expectin' you to do anything but dress up and go to the Court House," was the scornful rejoinder of the boy who came slouching into the kitchen. "Jiminy crickets! Who's here?" he yelled, as he caught sight of Philip. "Golly Moses, but you are some dude! What'd you bring me from New York?"

"Hello, kid!" laughed Philip. "My, but you've grown so I can no longer call you a kid! I brought you a camera, a mighty neat little trick you can carry around in your pocket."

"Gee! That's bully. I'll take a picture of ol' Mam' Peachy."

"I ain't gonter set fer no tintype. Please don't go snappin' no likeness er me, lil' Jo," pleaded the old woman.

"Well, it might bust my camera," laughed Jo.

Chapter 8

REBECCA GETS ACQUAINTED

Her first night in the country! The first night for little Rebecca Taylor spent anywhere but in the beloved studio, except for that one night on the sleeper. Dr. Price had recommended sleep and perfect quiet. Rebecca had been moved to the room that had been her father's, and there she lay, dozing and dreaming through the long June day. Every now and then Aunt Testy would come, bearing a tray of delicious food. Rebecca would keep her eyes open long enough to eat and then would drop back into fitful slumber.

"Where is my grandfather, Aunt Testy?" she asked when the dinner tray arrived, laden with food the like of which the little studio waif had seldom seen.

"He done been helt up down yonder to the hub fact'ry. He jes' phomed up to enquire arfter you. I answered it myself an' I could repo't you wa' a worryin' down right smart nourishment."

"I should say I am," laughed Rebecca. "I

am sleeping and eating all the time. I love this room too. To think of my father having slept in this self-same spot! What kind of a tree is that outside my window, Aunt Testy?"

"That there am a holly tree."

"You mean Christmas holly—the kind with red berries that costs fifty cents for just a little branch to make things kind of cheerful for Christmas? Oh, I'm so happy!"

Aunt Testy smiled a comfortable, fat smile, but at the same time wiped a little tear away with the corner of her apron.

"Now res' yo'se'f some mo', honey baby," she said, as she removed the tray.

Again the heavy lids drooped and Rebecca slept soundly. The next time Aunt Testy came in with more food she still slept and the old woman crept out.

"Sleep an' fergittin' is better'n eatin' an' rememberin'," she sagely remarked.

When Major Taylor at last returned from the hub factory he quickly mounted to his granddaughter's room. It was a chamber he had not entered for many years—not since his boy had occupied it. It reminded him too poignantly of Tom. Even now he must steel himself to be able to cross the threshold. He tapped lightly on the door. There was no

response. He waited a moment and then opened the door and softly entered. The room was so quiet he had a sudden fear that the child might have left. But no! There she lay on his Tom's bed. She looked quite different from the girl who had stood before him not so many hours ago and defied him. The strained, excited look had left the little face. In its place was one of perfect peace.

"Almost as though she had died," flashed through Major Taylor's mind. "Thank God, though, for the color on cheeks and lips and that sweetly taken breath."

Long he stood and gazed at her, his stern features working strangely and an occasional tear finding its way unheeded down his wrinkled cheeks. He longed for her to open her eyes and once more smile into his as she had in the morning after inspecting the persons gathered around her bed, but Nature had taken matters into her own hands and was working her perfect cure on the tired child. The old man finally crept out. He felt happier than he had since Tom left home.

Rebecca slept on and on. Daylight faded into twilight, twilight melted into moonlight, and still she slept. The Misses Taylor were sulking because of this interloper that had come

into their well-ordered lives, and when those ladies sulked, they sulked in silence. Spottswood was singularly reticent. He resented the arrival of this child, whom he considered a fraud, and he wondered at his astute father's accepting the little waif as his grandchild.

Major Taylor, in his endeavor to keep the house quiet so that Rebecca might sleep, made more noise than all the rest of the family put together.

"Heavens, Spot!" he exploded at the supper table, "do you have to make so much noise eating toast? You will disturb the child."

Spot turned red and gulped some water. The sound he made in swallowing called forth another remark from his father.

"I believe you are trying to wake her up. I never saw such a noisy lot of people."

The sisters looked at each other with raised eyebrows as much as to say their father was evidently slightly demented. Spot hurriedly finished his supper and left the table. Aunt Testy moved in and out of the dining room with guarded steps, directing Mandy, her assistant, with hoarse whispers.

"Don't rattle them knives an' forks! Prop open that there pantry do' less'n you kin open it 'thout fallin' 'ginst it ev'ry time. Looks like

Marse Bob an' me's the onlies' ones in this house what air tryin' ter keep quiet."

Even the noisy endeavors of her two friends to keep quiet did not awaken Rebecca. The Misses Taylor retired to their bedchambers without looking in on the stranger occupying the room that had been their brother's. Father and son sat in silence on the vine-covered porch. It was a night of nights. The moon was up and the rolling, grassy lawn with its great fringed elm, ash and oak trees was flooded with a radiance almost unearthly in its beauty. The wonder of it was touching the hearts of both men, but a certain lack of sympathetic understanding kept them apart. The katydids and tree frogs took up their song of summer and 'way off by the river a whippoorwill called persistently.

Once more before he went to rest Major Taylor tiptoed upstairs into Rebecca's room. She was sleeping like an infant. The moonlight lay in patches on the floor and bed. One slender little hand was in its path and for a moment the old man fancied he could detect a likeness between that hand and Tom's.

"Something about the thumb and curve of the wrist," he said to himself. "But I wish she did not have such black hair. It is fine, though, as

fine as blond hair," he decided, bending over her cautiously.

The moon was high when Rebecca at last opened her eyes. She thought she was back in the studio on West Tenth Street. There the moon used to shine through the skylight and make bars on the floor. She closed her eyes again and snuggled down comfortably on her pillow. She remembered the happenings of the last days as in a dream. It was all a dream surely, her stepfather's illness, her leaving the studio and everything. At any rate, now she was back in the studio, she was sure.

But what was that strange noise? Not the roar of New York, not a late party breaking up, not like any noise she had ever heard before! It seemed to the child like the deeply taken breath of some huge creature, a breath coming in waves and at intervals prolonged into a long drawn sigh. But more regular than this breathing was a steady beat, beat. It must be the creature's heart!

Rebecca was terrified. She sat up in bed and suddenly realized she was not in the studio. Before she could collect her scattered wits the night was cut by a shrill, blood-curdling screech.

"The giant has caught somebody," was her thought. "Now he is going to catch me!" She

lost all control of herself and screamed aloud: "Daddy! Daddy! Save me!"

The sound of her own voice brought her to her senses. She realized that she was not in New York, that her stepfather was in truth dead and she was in a strange house belonging to hitherto unknown relations. She began to sob.

Somebody was coming and it was not the monster, because *he* was out of doors and the person who was coming was on the stairs. She tried vainly to hold back the sobs.

Then Major Taylor appeared, bearing a lighted candle. He had been reading when he had heard the shrill cry, "Daddy! Daddy! Save me!"

"What is it, my darling?" The old man's voice was strangely gentle.

What would his daughters and son have thought had they heard his tone of endearment and seen his tender expression as he gathered the trembling child to his hungry heart?

"What has frightened you?"

"Oh! That giant! Listen, can't you hear him breathe? And his heart beats so loud. A minute ago he caught something—I think it was a child—its cry was so pitiful! I didn't mean to scream out so loud, but, sir, I thought

I was back in the studio and Daddy was alive and would come to me."

"You mean my son, Tom?" hoarsely.

"No, no! He was Father. Daddy was the last stepfather I had. But listen a minute and you can hear the noise that scared me so."

Rebecca was still trembling, but her sobs had ceased.

"Why, my dear, that is nothing but katydids and tree frogs and all the night creatures. Did you never hear them before?"

"No, sir! They don't do that way in New York. It sounds like a giant's deep breathing to me. And listen, only listen to his heart beats!"

"And that is the hydraulic ram that pumps the water up from the branch to the tank out there behind the house. That is the kind of waterworks we have at Mill House. You can go to see it to-morrow. It is nothing but a simple little machine that the water makes go and it works the pump."

"Oh! I guess you think I'm more of a nuisance than ever. I'm so sorry, but I did not know. If the little child had not screamed out I would not have let go."

"Little child?" Major Taylor could not help laughing, although he held Rebecca closer

to his breast. "You poor little thing, no wonder you were scared. That was just a screech owl. I heard it too just a moment before I heard you. I wonder if you scared the little owl as badly as it scared you. Listen! There it goes again."

Rebecca shuddered as the screech owl gave forth another of its weird calls.

"Is it a great big thing?"

"No, just a tiny little owl not as big as a new-born kitten and looking a little like one. But listen! That is a mockingbird." A sudden burst of music drowned all the other noises of the night.

"Oh, Grandfather! I could almost die of joy," Rebecca cried, as the song died out. "I never heard a mockingbird before in all my life. I didn't know they sang at night. And now that I know what the night sounds are I'll never be afraid again. It is really Mother Nature breathing, after all. I don't see how I am ever to sleep again at night—anyhow not when the moon is shining. There are so many things to see and hear. It is much more interesting than daytime."

"Tom, your father, loved the night, and he and I used to sit together on the porch and listen to the katydids and tree frogs. He loved to

hear the first bullfrogs in spring. You can hear them now, down in the marshes. Listen! This is what I used to tell Tom: The little baby bullfrogs say, 'Can't go to sleep! Can't go to sleep!' and the mother bullfrog says, 'Hush, my dears! Hush, my dears!' and the big father bullfrog says, 'Spank 'em! Spank 'em!'"

"Oh! Did you? How lovely! Tell me some more."

"The tree frogs say, 'Who cracked the kettle?' and the katydids call back, 'Katy did! Katy did!' and they get to fussing among themselves and some of them say, 'Katy didn't! Katy didn't!' and then way down in the edge of the wood someone calls out 'Whip poor Will! Whip poor Will!'"

The old man imitated the night noises with surprising skill. It had been many years since he had attempted it, but he seemed to enjoy it as much as Rebecca.

"And now you must go back to sleep because you will not wake up in time to hear the birds' chorus in the early morning if you don't. They have advertised their performance to take place at sun-up."

The wonders of the night had entranced Rebecca, but the delight of the dawn affected her, as she told her grandfather afterwards, like

the cello notes of an orchestra: "Creepy all up and down my backbone and my throat all choky with joy!"

The birds outdid themselves for her benefit on that first awakening in the country. She sprang from her bed and leaned so far out of her window she almost fell into the holly tree. A father robin and a father thrush were offering up their morning hymn of praise while the wives of their bosoms were busily engaged in trying to find enough breakfast for the gaping mouths of their respective families. A song sparrow had perched himself on the open blind of the parlor and was pouring forth a volume of melody.

To Rebecca it was all so new and wonderful that she forgot all about a possible breakfast and the necessary bath and clothes until Mandy knocked on her door, sent by Aunt Testy to remind her. Then a grand scramble ensued. The ugly black waist, so many sizes too large, was reluctantly donned.

"Mourning seems so out of place in such a world as this," she sighed, "but maybe Mrs. O'Shea knows best."

The dark curls would not come untangled, no matter how much she brushed and combed, and as a warning gong informed her that breakfast

was ready, she caught her hair back with a hairpin and ran downstairs.

The aunts and Spottswood had that minute seated themselves at the table as Rebecca came running in the room.

"Good morning, everybody!" she cried gaily. "I was so afraid I'd be late to breakfast I almost broke my neck hurrying. Where is my grandfather?"

"My father has gone early to the hub factory," said Aunt Evelyn with a manner so chilly that Rebecca looked at her in amazement. There was a slight accent on "my father" that conveyed a subtle suggestion that Rebecca's grandfather and Evelyn's father were not one and the same person.

Rebecca had thought, of course, that when her grandfather accepted her as his own flesh and blood the others would do the same. If she belonged to them they would naturally love her. and she would try to love them. Surely, her Aunt Evelyn was not feeling well. A pain somewhere would account for that vinegary expression. The morning was too lovely and she was too hungry to bother much about moods.

"Oh, I had the most heavenly rest! Such a bed! Such delicious eats, whenever I could wake up to know about it! Such—"

Her effusions were stopped short by a cold and disapproving "Hush!" from Aunt Myra. It was as though someone had shot a skylark in its upward flight. Rebecca was silenced. She bowed her head in mortification, not knowing that the others at the table also were bowing theirs, until she heard Aunt Evelyn in devout tones asking that the Creator might bless the food to their use and them to His service.

"I—I beg your pardon," she faltered when Aunt Evelyn finished and the business of eating was begun. "I have never said my prayers at the table and—and did not know."

"Do not be sacrilegious," commanded Aunt Evelyn.

"I did not mean—" But what she did not mean was of no importance to her relatives and Rebecca's remarks trailed off into empty space.

Breakfast progressed in solemn silence. The child was big-eyed over the quantity and variety of food. Accustomed to a breakfast of chocolate and rolls and in affluent days maybe an orange or half of a grapefruit, this old Virginia breakfast seemed to her like a feast. There were strawberries and cream, roe-herring, ham and eggs, fried potatoes, fried apples, batter-bread, and then when all was over seemingly, stacks of waffles made their appearance.

Forgetting that talking was evidently not in favor with her relatives at meal time, Rebecca suddenly burst out with: "It reminds me of the ads in the subway. I used to sit and look at the ham and eggs and waffles and things until I'd get so hungry I didn't know what to do. I know it isn't high art to paint fried eggs so you can almost smell them, but it is very clever of the artist. Don't you think so, Uncle Spot?"

The young man looked up in astonishment, but not at her. What business did this little person have calling him Uncle Spot? She did not wait for a reply.

"Now, I don't think much of the way they do the waffles. They seem so stiff and uncompromising, with no feeling in them. I am sure they would never melt the butter as Aunt Testy's do, but maybe the poor artist did not have a good model. Perhaps he never had an Aunt Testy in his life."

"I want the phaeton and Dolly this morning, Spottswood," Miss Evelyn said, paying not the least attention to Rebecca's gay little attempt at conversation. "I have an appointment with Miss Wood to try on my blue taffeta."

"I will go with you," said Miss Myra. "I am anxious to match some wool over at the Court House."

"I thought a court house was a place where they tried criminals and kept deeds and things," broke in Rebecca. Nobody explained to her that in Virginia the county seat was always called the Court House.

Breakfast being over, the family arose and left the table without saying a word to the forlorn little girl.

"Gee! But they are dumb!" said Rebecca to herself. "I wonder if they are silent because they have nothing to say or just because they don't want to talk before me. I'll burst if I don't let out some of the talk that is in me. Not one member of the family addressed a remark to me except Aunt Myra, and all she said was 'Hush!' and 'Don't be sacrilegious.' I hope it'll be different when Grandfather is at home."

"Aunt Testy," she asked, as the fat cook waddled in to superintend Mandy in the clearing of the breakfast table, "where does Aunt Pearly Gates live? I thought I'd go see her this morning and make her acquaintance."

"You-all's right, honey chil', but fer the land's sake don't go clost ter that there ram down in the meadow. It ain't no trus'worthy animule."

Rebecca smiled. She had often heard of the superstition of the darkeys, but this was too

ridiculous, for Aunt Testy to be afraid of an innocent piece of machinery that faithfully pumped water day and night for use at Mill House.

"All right," she answered gaily, "I'll take a stick after it if it offers me any insult."

"Ain't it the truf? Well, honey baby, you jes' keep right on down the lane yonder an' when you git pretty nigh the river you'll see a kinder gap in the wire fence wif tater sacks wropped 'round two wires so folks kin scratch through 'thout leaving a piece er meat on none er the barbs. They's a clay path there goin' through the meadow that will take you spang onto Aunt Pearly Gates' cabin. The path goes right on through Rocky Ford and right smart chancet er water air in the stream, but I 'low your legs are long an' light enough fer you to step acrost from rock ter rock. You'd bes' put on yo' hat, case the sun am tolable hot."

Chapter 9

A RELUCTANT KNIGHT ERRANT

Rebecca had not unpacked her modest wardrobe, so she donned her mourning bonnet, the only headgear available, and since she was to pay a ceremonial visit to Aunt Pearly Gates it seemed quite appropriate that she should wear this bonnet. A weird little figure she made, as she trudged happily down the lane. She had seen the ladies of the family drive off in the phaeton to the mysterious court house. Spottswood had disappeared in the direction of the barn. She had watched him light his pipe on the front porch, and then, with a whistle to Doctor, his dog, he had walked off with long swinging steps. He had looked so kindly on his dog that the child thought how splendid it would be if she had been born a nice black and white doggy with glossy fur that wasn't long enough to get tangled and great patient eyes and no desire to talk and a heart that was satisfied with an occasional pat from his master, with a kind word thrown in now and then.

"I don't care, my Grandfather will talk to

me, and what is better, he will listen," she mused as she followed the path in the lane. "I don't mind the aunts not liking me so much as Uncle Spot, but I do wish he'd loosen up a bit. But they needn't think I'm going to do all the polite trying. If they don't like me they can just lump me. I'm not going to be any more miserable than I can help."

Having decided to get as much enjoyment out of life as possible, Rebecca tried to put all thought of her reluctant relations out of mind. Certainly there were enough delights in the country to keep her fairly contented even though the haughty aunts did make themselves disagreeable and the handsome uncle refused to speak to or even to look at her.

A rabbit ran across her path, his little white tuft of a tail shining in the sun. She found a patch of belated wild strawberries which she picked and devoured greedily. With difficulty she tore herself away from a tree of black heart cherries that hung its luscious fruit invitingly over the fence. She heard a bobwhite call from a thicket beyond, and farther down the lane there was a great whirr as a covey of speckled birds rose in the air.

"Something happenin' every minute, just like the movies!" she cried delightedly. "Listen!

here's the ram a-ramming. It doesn't make so much noise in the day-time as it does at night. I must see it, too. Grandfather said I must. Funny, old Aunt Testy telling me it was dangerous."

The gap in the barbed wire fence was found as Aunt Testy had directed. Rebecca crawled through the wrapped place and followed the pink path across the meadow. The noise of the ram increased as she approached the bubbling, tumbling little stream that cut through the green pasture.

"Heavens, what a darling little brook!" she cried as the path curved around the hill and suddenly descended to the stream, where it dived under, as Rebecca expressed it, only to come up on the other side as dry and pink as ever. Willows bordered the brook. Under a shelving bank was the home of the hydraulic ram, a low, box-like house about four feet high with a sloping roof of rough boards designed merely to protect the machinery from the grazing cattle. From its interior came the steady thud, thud of the ram.

"It sounds like a spirit in prison," thought Rebecca as she approached the little house. "I wonder if you want to get out," she whispered through a knot hole in the side. It seemed to

her as though the noise of the machinery grew louder and the water splashed more vigorously.

"You haven't any windows and you haven't any doors—but I see you have a roof with hinges! Maybe I can open it." With a mighty effort she raised the roof, slamming it wide open, and peeped down into the dank interior.

"Well, you are very small to make so much noise and do so much work. I like your house, with its sides all covered with moss, but I must say you need a good airing. I guess I'll leave your roof open for some sun to get in on you while I go call on Aunt Pearly Gates. Make the most of it, Mr. Ram, because I shall have to shut you up again on my way home. I believe I'll call you Faithful Heart. I do think poor Aunt Testy is real foolish to be afraid of you; ungrateful, too, because if it were not for you she might have to come 'way down to the spring and carry up buckets of water on her head as I have read the darkeys in the South used to do. I love you, my Faithful Heart; but good-bye for awhile. I'll come back soon and shut your skylight down."

Rebecca tripped along the clay path. Her heart was light. She hummed a little tune, trying to fit some lines of poetry to it.

"Oh, what is so rare, rare, rare, as a day in

June, June, June?" she trilled. "I wonder if I am going to be a singer or a poet or if I am going to be a farmer's wife and raise turkeys. I might be all three—that is, if I keep on living in the country. Look at the precious lamb coming down the path to meet me!"

At the top of the hill was a flock of sheep. They were spread out as though on dress parade and peered over the brow of the hill at the girl as she advanced up the path. Their leader had separated himself from the flock and slowly and sedately came to meet Rebecca.

"Lamby, lamby!" she called when about a hundred yards off. "You are mighty sweet and woolly. Do you lie down in these beautiful green pastures, and are you led beside these still waters? Surely one could fear no evil in such a spot. I think it is sweet of you to come to meet me."

The little girl held out her hand and hurried along the path. As she came closer to the advancing animal she was astonished to see how much larger it was than it had at first seemed.

"You are no spring lamb, that's certain," said Rebecca, "but you are mighty handsome, anyhow. I don't think you have a very pretty face," she decided as the creature drew nearer and its curled horns and evil eyes revealed

themselves to the gaze of the city-bred child.

"Baa! Baa!" The answer came with a harsh note, not at all lamb-like, and then with a sudden rush the animal plunged down the hill, with head lowered.

Rebecca jumped aside. What must she do? She could not run up hill, because at the top there awaited her a whole flock of "lambs," who might be even more ferocious than the creature with the curling horns that had attempted to butt her down. The ram, angered by his failure, stopped in his downward lunge and turned about, looking at Rebecca with such an evil expression that she wondered that she had ever called him "Lamby." She was rooted to the ground. Her assailant began sidling up the hill. He knew enough about butting to realize he could indulge in his favorite pastime better if he had the advantage of being above his victim.

Rebecca's heart was beating so rapidly she was almost suffocated. She instinctively pressed her hand to her side. Suddenly she remembered Faithful Heart at the bottom of the hill. There was her refuge! She began to run. Aunt Testy had spoken truly when she had said her legs were long and light; they might have been wings, so quickly did they carry the frightened

child down the hill. The ram was taken by surprise. For a moment he stood still and then started after her.

In Rebecca's hasty flight the mourning bonnet slid from her head. It proved a sop to Cerberus. For several seconds the ram gave up the chase and satisfied himself by pawing the bonnet to pulp. It gave Rebecca time to tumble over the wall into the house occupied by the hydraulic ram, where she crouched trembling, thankful she had left the top open. She couldn't decide which heart—hers or Faithful Heart's—beat the louder. The ram was enraged now, and besides, he must show his flock, which had started to run down the hill, what a truly great person he was. He had never liked the noise that came from that closed box and now that the little creature whom he had marked for destruction had taken refuge there, the thud, thud that came forth was more distasteful than ever to his majesty. He gathered himself together for a mighty rush.

"Blim!" he came against the side of Rebecca's refuge. The stout oak boards gave him as good as he sent and he rolled over into the water.

Rebecca thought she heard someone laughing. Through the knot hole she had viewed the overthrow of her enemy, and had almost laughed

herself, but she was sure she had not given way to audible mirth. She had a feeling she had better not laugh too soon. The ram had scrambled to his feet and was backing off with the intention of returning once more to the fray.

Click! Rebecca was sure now she could hear something besides the steady beating of Faithful Heart and the rushing of the water. Again the ram charged bravely, but the little house was built on a rock foundation and the boards were of oak and once more the animal met with such stout resistance that he rolled over into the stream.

Click! "Ha! Ha!"

Rebecca was sure, now, that she heard a laugh. What the click was she could not divine, but, taking advantage of the prostration of her pursuer, she stood up and peeped over the top of the shed.

"Hallo! Who are you, anyhow? So you're what the old critter was after! Just hold still a minute, will you?"

She found herself confronted by a boy of about her own age. He was a bonny fellow, but his manner was rough and Rebecca instinctively drew back from him.

"You needn't be scared of me. I'm just gonter take your picture. I already got the ol'

ram laying in the water and I cotched him on the fly, too, and now I'd like to have you lookin' like the devil was after you, the way you did when you first peeped over the wall."

So, the click was a camera!

"Ain't it a beaut? My brother brought it to me from New York. I'm a gonter learn how to develop the fillums myself and print 'em an' mount 'em an' all."

"Ye-es, but mind out! Here comes the sheep after you!" screamed Rebecca. The ram had picked himself up and was directing his attentions towards the new comer.

"Yes he is!" was the boy's scornful rejoinder. "I'll bus' open his fool head with a rock. Here, hold my camera!"

The ram stood with lowering head, his evil eye taking in the situation. He saw the boy stoop and select from the bed of the stream several stones. Had Goliath of Gath shown as much discretion as this pugnacious ram he might have lived to fight again. The animal uttered a meek little "Baa," turned tail and made a dignified exit up the pink path to where his admiring females stood midway up the hill.

Rebecca laughed and looked at the boy with more admiration than she had felt at first.

"Aren't you afraid of him?"

"That ol' ram! Naw! He can't hurt a flea! All you have to do is shake a stick at him."

"He would have killed me if I hadn't jumped into the house of Faithful Heart."

"Is that what you call that there en-jine?"

"Yes. But won't you tell me your name so I can thank you for saving my life?"

Rebecca had begun to feel like the heroine of a romance and now that the hateful ram had taken himself off she was enjoying the experience hugely. "I am Rebecca Taylor."

"My name's Jo Bolling."

"Not really! Why, then you must be the brother of my first friend, Mr. Philip Bolling! But you couldn't be."

"I'd like to know why I couldn't be. I just am. What makes you say I couldn't be? I reckon girls are funny things, anyhow."

"Perhaps we are, but I'd be much obliged if you would help me out of this house."

"I won't help you out until you tell me why you think I can't be no brother to Philip."

"You have given two good reasons in what you have just said," teased Rebecca.

"Pooh! You ain't got no reason."

"Another good reason!"

"Aw, quit yer kiddin'! If you don't tell me I'll shut you in the box," he threatened, taking

hold of the door and raising it slightly.

"Please don't, because I'm on the way to making a call and I could never get out if you shut me up here with Faithful Heart, and the old sheep might come back and butt me over," pleaded Rebecca.

"Well, then tell me," insisted Jo.

"If you must know, you must. In the first place, Mr. Philip Bolling's brother would have taken off his hat when he addressed a lady."

"Where is the lady at?" asked Joe scornfully.

"He would never have said: 'Where is the lady *at?*' but: 'Where is the lady?' Mr. Philip Bolling's brother would not threaten a lady, even if the lady happened to be only a little girl. He wanted to give up his lower berth to me on the train just exactly as though I had been an old, old person."

"Yes, he did—not!"

"Mr. Philip Bolling's brother wouldn't say: 'That there en-jine,' but just 'That engine.' He wouldn't say ''Aint got no' under any circumstances."

"Aw, I reckon you're right sissified."

"I don't know whether I am or not, but I know I want to get out of this place and can't do it."

"How did you git in? What you can git into you can git out of."

"I could never have got in if I had not been so frightened. I got in by myself to keep the old sheep from butting me in. You promised to help me out if I told you why you couldn't be Mr. Philip Bolling's brother."

"You ain't—I mean you haven't—given a single good reason."

"Well, Mr. Philip Bolling's brother wouldn't say 'git' for 'get.' In fact, Mr. Philip Bolling is an elegant gentleman."

"Humph!" The boy caught hold of the side of the house and shook it viciously.

"And Mr. Philip Bolling's finger nails are clean and well kept and his manners are kind and gentle, and—"

"Well, ain't—aren't you gonter git—get—out of this to-day? Here I am waiting to help you," the boy retorted sullenly. He held out his hands.

"Put your toe in a crack and kinder climb a little and I can pull you out," he suggested.

Rebecca got out with surprising ease.

"I am very much obliged to you, Jo. I believe now you might be Mr. Philip Bolling's brother, after all. I am trying to go call on Aunt Pearly Gates. Could you come a little

way with me and shoo off the old sheep if she comes near me?"

"Sheep! That's a ram. All you gotter do is to take a stick along. That ol' coward wouldn't do nothing—anything—to you if you show him a stick or a rock. But I reckon I'll go along with you. I ain't—haven't—got nothing—anything—to do, and I was on my way to Aunt Pearly Gates's myself, anyhow. So come along!"

"I'm afraid the sheep—ram—has done for my bonnet," sighed Rebecca as she ruefully picked up the shapeless bit of millinery. "I'm almost glad, because now even Mrs. O'Shea couldn't think it was showing respect to Daddy for me to wear it."

"Let me make you a hat out of sycamore leaves; the sun will fair bake your brains," said Jo. He jumped up and caught the low-hanging branch of a plane tree that grew near the stream, plucked a few of the broad leaves and deftly fashioned a hat for the girl, fastening the parts with twigs.

"How lovely!" crooned Rebecca. "Now I'll trim it with daisies and be as grand as one could wish." She put it on and looked at Jo demurely.

"'Taint so bad—I mean it isn't so bad. But your dress is mighty black."

"Isn't it? You see I'm in mourning for my dear, latest and best stepfather. But I don't think it would be disrespectful for me to decorate all over with buttercups. It would be kind of like putting flowers on Daddy's grave."

Rebecca fashioned chains of daisies, which she hung around her neck and waist. Buttercups she put in buttonholes and belt.

"Now! Ho, for Aunt Pearly Gates!" she cried. "Isn't it funny how depressing mourning is? Now I am furbished up a bit with some color I feel like dancing."

She pirouetted in front of Jo until he was dizzy. "If you'd a done that to the old ram he'd a scooted for sure," laughed the boy.

They found Aunt Pearly Gates expecting them.

"I 'lowed you'd be a comin' along sometime ter-day ter tell me all 'bout Mr. Philip's a comin' home an' what he brung you from up yonder," she said to Jo, "an' I wa' mos' confident that lil' Miss Beck baby'd be findin' her way down ter old Pearly Gates as soon as she could git rested up. New Testament come down here las' night a tellin' me all about you arrivin' up ter Mill House. I say: Praise the Lawd! It's one great day fer the fambly that brings a chil' er Marse Tom's ter light."

The old woman was propped up on snowy pillows in a great four-posted bed. Her cabin was as clean as clean could be, it being the pride and pleasure of her children and grandchildren to keep everything in perfect order for the bedridden Aunt Pearly Gates. She lived alone with her faithful Si, but was visited daily by members of her family who attended to her few wants. There she lay, year in and year out, knitting and tatting and receiving her visitors with kindliness and cheer, listening to the tales of happiness and sorrow poured into her sympathetic ears by old and young, colored and white.

She looked keenly but kindly at Rebecca, smiling at her garlands of daisies.

"So you air Marse Tom's lil' gal. You don't favor him none in looks 'cept'n he wa' a great hand to play act, but 'pearances ain't eve'ything. If you air got his kind ways and laughin' heart that'll mean mo'n jes' his outsides. 'Member, chil', when you wants a frien', ol' Pearly Gates am always here in the baid ready ter sarve you."

Then she must listen to Jo's account of his brother's return and look at the new camera.

"Philip's coming to see you soon, he says, but he's got a lot to do. Gee, I wouldn't work like him, not for nothing. I say let Ol' Abe and Young Abe and Little Abe do the work the

way they been a doing it. Philip's going to try and buck up aginst Mam' Peachy's gang and he might just as well give up 'fore he starts. Mam' Peachy ain't gonter let nobody—anybody"—looking up quickly at Rebecca and correcting himself with a flush—"anybody get ahead of her and her crowd."

A shadow passed over Aunt Pearly Gates' good old face.

"I hope he won't git in no trouble," she said solemnly. "Tell him I says ter go moughty keerful. Ol' Mam' Peachy air a tricky pusson."

Chapter 10

CHARMS AND PICTURES

The task of adjusting herself to country life was an all-engrossing one to Rebecca. She realized the importance of trying, if not to please the aunts, at least to get along without angering them; but more important than anything else was to find out everything connected with the creatures on the farm. She soon knew all of the animals on the place, and, if one happened not to have a name, she immediately christened it. She made friends with the colored people, who adored her.

The little girl longed to follow Spottswood, as he went about his daily business, but his cold manner held her back. Her aunts were equally distant, albeit they made a ladylike show of politeness to the little waif. They spoke often of filial duty compelling them to respect the wishes of their father in regard to his "so-called grandchild." Evelyn remembered her in her prayers night and morning and Myra undertook to teach her to crochet, each lady thereby feeling that

she was discharging her full and Christian duty to the child.

To be sure, they laid down certain rules of conduct for Rebecca which they endeavored to enforce. She must come to meals on time; she must wear a sunbonnet; she must learn the catechism; she must say "Yes, ma'm," and "No, ma'm," "Yes, sir" and "No, sir," when older persons questioned her; she must never loll in her chair, but sit bolt upright as became one who aspired to become a gentlewoman; she must master the difference in pronunciation between to and too if she wished to be considered a Virginian or even the descendant of one. Every Virginian worthy of consideration must know that t-o-o was pronounced two, and t-o was pronounced tow.

There were many other petty rules, and Rebecca found them all difficult to keep. To be on time at meals was the most difficult of all and the one rule about which the aunts were the most particular. Meals had always been uncertain affairs in the studio on West Tenth Street. There they ate when they were hungry. This thing of three meals, sitting down solemnly to a table; making a rite of breakfast, dinner and supper, was irksome as well as amusing to the little creature, strayed from Bohemia.

In spite of the pleasure she took in the plentiful, wholesome food and Aunt Testy's wonderful cooking, Rebecca often longed for the one privilege of crackers and tea, curled up on the divan, while she read thrilling stories recommended by Daddy, and where the only formality was blowing the crumbs away.

Evelyn and Myra were not inclined to correct Rebecca in their father's presence, but they never forgot to point out the error of her ways when they were alone with her. For herself, the child made it a point to be left alone with them as seldom as possible. They highly disapproved of her intimacy with the colored persons on the farm, but Major Taylor vetoed their objections and openly declared that his granddaughter was to see as much of Aunt Pearly Gates as she desired, and he himself took her to the mill and put her in the especial care of old Si Johnson. There she spent many happy hours, listening to the splash of the mill wheel and the hum of the simple machinery, with Brer Johnson expounding the scriptures the while.

All of her frets and worries Rebecca took to Aunt Pearly Gates. And to every childish problem the old woman gave earnest attention, doing all in her power to help the little orphan over the rough places. A day never passed that

Rebecca did not visit the cabin. She often met Jo Bolling there. Sometimes she found him waiting for her at the ford. She knew he was waiting for her, although the boy always pretended to be much astonished that she should be coming that way just when he happened to be sitting on the roof of Faithful Heart's house. He would cross the little river by means of a huge sycamore tree that had fallen across it not far from the mouth of the stream that worked the hydraulic ram. Sometimes he would climb a willow tree, hiding from her until she was in midstream, jumping from stone to stone, and then he would suddenly call out like a screech owl, and be highly delighted if Rebecca should start with fright and slip into the shallow water, wetting her little shoes.

Jo taught her many things besides how to bluff a cowardly ram; lore that is almost instinctive knowledge with children born in the country. She drank in the information greedily, taking in all Jo told her as shining truth. Sometimes his biology was a little sketchy, but always it was wonderful to the city-bred child.

"Does a springkeeper make the water pure and clear, Jo?" she asked wonderingly, as he showed her a strange-looking, crawfish-like creature.

"Yes, indeed, and we'd have all kinds of typhoid fever and things if it wasn't for these here—these springkeepers," declared the boy. Rebecca continued the policy adopted at their first meeting, that of correcting his uncouth English.

"It seems like a fairy to me—one that has been changed into a hideous form by some old witch and can only resume its beautiful form after having purified gallons and gallons of water," she said.

Jo laughed. "I reckon there ain't much fairy about this old bug."

"Ain't, Jo?"

"Well, isn't, then!"

"Jo, do you mind when I pick on you? I'll stop it if you do."

"No, I kinder like it. I don't 'low Betsy to do it. I reckon it's because she's got a right to."

"Maybe that's the reason I hate to have Aunt Evelyn and Aunt Myra correcting me so much. Perhaps they have a right to. They certainly do exercise their rights pretty freely. I wonder if they want me to be like them! Now I pick on you so you will get to be more like Mr. Philip."

"That's the reason I don't mind so much. I tell you my brother Philip is some humdinger!

Things are sure different since he got back. I believe old Mam' Peachy is skairt of him. Betsy gave her some kind of dope about Philip's being a better conjerer than what she is, and she's got the old woman a guessing. Betsy told me to tell you she's making some gingerbread and if you come over she'll have it just about baked and we can mix up some lemonade. I've got your photograph done, too. It's the one I took the time the ol' ram got you going. Philip helped me develop it."

"Oh, goody! Of course I'll come. The aunts have gone calling, so I won't have to ask them. They'd say no if they were home, so, thank goodness, they are off."

They crossed the river on the coon bridge, Rebecca removing her shoes and stockings for the difficult feat of making a safe passage on the slippery sycamore tree.

"Grip the bark with your toe nails," warned Jo. "I let mine grow long a purpose."

"I'd love to go barefoot all the time," sighed Rebecca, "but the aunts were so shocked when I suggested it anyone would think I had already committed a great sin. They talked about birth and breeding until grandfather and I got bored stiff. He made them mad by saying he guessed they were born barefoot for that matter, and as

for breeding, they must have been bred from Eve and she certainly is always pictured as barefooted. Anyhow, it hurts my feet terribly to walk on rough places without my shoes and stockings. I don't see how you do it."

"I just scrooch up my toes this way and the stubble and pebbles and things don't touch the tender part o' my soles. I hate shoes. I reckon I'll have to wear 'em all the time when I get to be a man."

Rebecca was not often allowed to visit at The Hedges. The aunts disapproved of her association with the Bollings even more than with the negroes, but when she appealed to her grandfather for the privilege of an occasional call on her friends he consented, not that he was desirous of an intimacy between the families, but he could not but acknowledge the kindness shown Rebecca by Philip Bolling, and also he took a certain pleasure in treading on the aristocratic toes of his lady daughters.

So Rebecca was allowed an occasional trip across the river. She took a few more than her aunts were aware of, but she always confessed to her grandfather when her desire for companionship became too strong for her, and he laughingly absolved her for sneaking off without the knowledge of her feminine mentors.

She was ever a welcome guest at The Hedges. Elizabeth liked the child for herself, and would have been kind to her because of Philip's interest in her and because she could not but see the good influence the little girl was having on Jo, who before the advent of Rebecca had become more and more difficult to manage, rough and coarse in his manner of speech and with a tendency to untidiness that Elizabeth dreaded more than anything else. Betsy, in spite of several years difference in their ages, found the little New York waif interesting and congenial. She liked to hear her talk about the wonders of the city, her life in the studio, visits to Coney Island and the Bronx Zoo; but also above all did Betsy like to listen to her little friend when she waxed enthusiastic concerning the manly beauty of her Uncle Spottswood.

Even Aunt Peachy was polite to Rebecca, but with a cringing and unctuous manner that her mistress and Betsy well understood meant she hated the child as she did all of the Taylors and those connected with Mill House.

Rebecca was fascinated by the strange ugliness of Aunt Peachy. She had no fear of her, but felt instinctively that she was evil.

"An' how is the pretty lil' missy ter-day?" whined the old woman. "I 'lowed we wa' gonter

have callers when I seen that there Betsy a stirrin' up sumpen. Is all yo' folks well?"

"Grandfather was complaining of a little rheumatism," answered Rebecca.

"Too bad! Too bad!" said Aunt Peachy, but there was a malevolent gleam in her rat-like eyes. "He must be a gittin' ol'. I had a touch er rheumatiz myself goin' on thirty years ago, but I done outgrowed it. I mus' fix up a poultice fer the po' ol' man."

"Oh, thank you very much, but I doubt Grandfather's using it. He is so opposed to medicines and liniments."

"This here is a charm poultice I's gonter sen' him," insisted Aunt Peachy.

"Oh, you old crazy," broke in Jo. "Major Taylor ain't gonter touch your bad-smelling stuff with a ten-foot pole."

"But it is very kind of you," insisted Rebecca politely, looking at Jo reproachfully. "Where are the photographs you promised to show me, Jo?"

"Here they are, an' I printed off two for you, two of every kind. This is the way you looked when you peeped over the wall at me. The light wasn't so strong, but it is pretty good anyhow."

"Le' me see! Le' me see!" whimpered Aunt

Peachy, who was never satisfied unless she was included in everything. "Is that there the pretty lil' missy? Laws-a-mussy, but I'd be proud ter own one er these here tintypes."

"Would you, really?" asked Rebecca. "If Jo gives me two I will give you one of them. That is, if he will print me another for Aunt Pearly Gates. There is nobody else who would care much for a picture of me, nobody in Virginia, at least."

"Thank yer! Thank yer!" muttered the old woman, clutching the little print eagerly and poring over it with half-closed eyes. "I'll keep good keer of it, never fear."

"Well, don't try any hoodoo monkey shines with it," commanded Jo.

"Me! Laws-a-mussy, lil' Jo, you done fergit I's a chu'ch mimber in good standin'. I ain't up ter no sich tricks."

"Well, how about that charm poultice, then?" parried Jo, with a grin.

"I wa' jes' a foolin' 'bout that. My poultices air jes' made er good fresh yarbs. I gonter git a frame fer this here tintype."

The old woman clasped the picture tightly and glided from the kitchen, leering at Rebecca as she went.

"Isn't she a funny old thing" Rebecca said

to Betsy, who was taking the pans of gingerbread from the oven.

"Yes, she is funny, but I reckon she is too old to do any harm now," laughed Betsy. "She worries Mother and Philip to death, but I never bother my head about her. Philip has got the upper hand of her now and sometimes I almost feel sorry for the poor old rat."

Chapter 11

MAGIC—BLACK AND WHITE

Philip Bolling's summer had been one of unceasing labor, mental and physical. He felt that if he could not assert his supremacy on his father's farm and make Old Abe understand that he was master he would deserve to be ruled by the blacks, having been weighed in the balance and found wanting. If his superior mentality and education could not make him the master then it was proof that he lacked character. Philip's boyhood had been one of meekly giving up and doing what his father commanded. It had been the only way to keep the peace, and peace for his mother had been the one idea. She had always entreated him to avoid quarrels, as she feared the vindictiveness of Aunt Peachy and her influence on Rolfe Bolling. She still feared it, and begged her son not to be rash in his treatment of Aunt Peachy's son, Old Abe, and his swarms of lazy, thieving offspring, headed by Young Abe and Little Abe.

Philip smiled at his mother's fears.

"What could a crazy old negress do to me?" he asked. "She is so feeble she can hardly get out of her chair."

"She is not so feeble as she pretends, and she can make Old Abe and his kind do her bidding."

"Well, so can I," said Philip quietly. "How many children are there over in the quarters?"

"Goodness only knows! It looks like an ant hill."

"Well, every child there is going to school next term if I have to haul them myself."

"School! Why, Philip, they are bad enough as it is, and school would make them unbearable," cried Elizabeth. "Are you in earnest?"

"Dead earnest, Mother dear! You felt an education was important for me, and I feel it is even more important for the colored people. Look at them on the other side of the river, all of Uncle Si's kin and Aunt Testy's children, all of the people connected with Mill House and the ones who work in the hub factory. They are a fine lot, good workmen and good citizens. Major Taylor has seen to it that they were taught something at school. His father and mother before him gave some education to their slaves. Look at the contrast between our colored people and his!"

Philip might have added a comparison

between the master of The Hedges and the master of Mill House, but he refrained.

"We won't say anything about it until a few weeks before school starts in the fall, but I am going to get busy with the County Superintendent and see to it that what law for compulsory education exists in Virginia shall be enforced right here on our farm."

Old Abe was too old to educate, but he was not too old to be taught something and the day after Philip got home Abe was to learn that matters were not going to be quite so easy for him and his lazy sons and grandsons as they had been for the many years since Rolfe Bolling got so fat he had turned over the management of the farm to him.

Old Abe's attitude at first was one of amusement towards his master's young son, who had been so busy learning how to read that he had let the farm get out of his hands.

"I 'low you is done forgot what lil' you know'd 'bout farmin', Phup," he said slyly, as he and Philip started to make the rounds of the farm on a tour of inspection.

Philip looked keenly at the stalwart old man at his side. Surely, he had come of a powerful race. He was over seventy, but as straight as an arrow, with not an ounce of superfluous

flesh on his huge bones. He walked a little unsteadily, as though he had had a little too much drink. His hair and beard were grizzled and his eyes were growing dim, but otherwise he looked as Philip remembered him when he was a child and Old Abe used to let him ride the horse while he plowed. Old Abe had always been kind to him, although in a furtive way as if he did not want anyone to see him. Perhaps he felt that his mother, Aunt Peachy, would have disapproved of his showing any attention to the boy, whom she always had resented as a person who was rivaling her "baby."

"No, Uncle Abe, I haven't forgotten a thing you taught me while I have been off trying to get an education, not a thing, and what's more, I have been learning more things about farming—things I am going to introduce here at The Hedges. You are going to help me, too, aren't you, Uncle Abe?"

"Well, I ain't no hand ter be takin' up new notions," hesitated Abe. "I'm a gonter run this farm lak I been a runnin' it an' lak Marse Rolfe runned it, an' his paw befo' him. You might take a lil' piece er lan' down in the bottom ter 'speriment with," he suggested, as though Philip had been a child who wanted to play at gardening.

Philip laughed. "Oh, I don't ask you to run it differently. I am going to do the running and you will take orders from me. Of course, my father had to turn things over to you while I was away, but now I am home, naturally I will take charge." Philip looked Abe squarely in the eye and the old man endeavored to return his stare, but his eyes finally fell before Philip's clear gaze.

"I am going to ask you, Uncle Abe, to call me *Mr.* Philip. It makes no real difference to me where you are concerned, but I feel that it will make a difference to the hands on the farm. I have no idea of allowing any familiarity from them and I am sure if you set the pace for politeness that they will follow you. It will make things easier all around if you begin immediately to call me *Mr.* Philip."

"Ye-ye-yes, sah!" hesitated Old Abe.

"Not only are you to speak to me respectfully, but you are to speak *of* me respectfully. This is important and I am going to trust you to attend to it. Tell Young Abe and Little Abe and any of the others who expect to work on the farm at any time, I am not going to put up with any impertinence."

"Sho', Mr. Phup, th'ain't nobody gonter sarse you nor none er the Bollin's. We'd have my

mammy ter fight if any er us chilluns tuck ter sassin' a Bollin'," whined the old man.

Philip laughed. "Of course you won't. *I am just telling you,* you won't. As for Aunt Peachy: I'd be very glad if you tell her exactly what I have told you."

"Fo' Gawd, Phup—Mr. Phup, Mam' Peachy'd lay me out if I carried any sich tale ter her. You think I's been a bossin' this here fawm, but I ain't never bossed none, Mr. Phup, no mo'n yo' paw ever bossed it, er yo' grampaw befo' him. Mam' Peachy air a been bossin' The Hedges fer goin' on a hundred years. We takes our orders fum her. To be sho' she gits Marse Rolfe ter han' it on ter us, but she air the maindes' pusson ter be reckoned with."

"Well, after this you take your orders from me." Philip said no more on the subject, but continued his inspection of the farm. He carried a pencil and tablet with him and carefully noted the things that needed his immediate attention. The fences were in a deplorable condition and the outhouses were crying out for new shingles or to be propped up. The silo was on the slant of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Neither paint nor whitewash had been applied to any of the buildings for at least twenty years. Stables and barns were dirty. Farm imple-

ments lay in fence corners, or even in the middle of fields, where horses had been unhitched at the sound of the dinner horn, and that particular bit of plowing or cultivating never taken up again. All of these things Philip noted in a systematic way.

There was shed room enough for any and all farming implements, but the natural shiftlessness of the darkeys, born on the Bolling place with generations of shiftless masters, had prevented their ever seeing the necessity of order and care in such matters. Philip had forgotten how absolutely careless the running of the farm was. It seemed strange to him that anybody as parsimonious as was his father should be negligent in such things—things that represented money. Rolfe Bolling's one idea had been to save cash, but his natural slothfulness always had been his handicap. He could drive a hard bargain in a trade and demand a huge rate of interest when someone sought a loan. This lending money was always done as a neighbor and kept very quiet. If the rate of interest was illegal the authorities never were informed of it.

The farm had been mismanaged until it was only by luck that it furnished food for the family; what with the overworking of certain

parts of the land and the useless lying fallow of other parts, and the constant drain of the swarm of lazy darkeys who inhabited the quarters, working when it pleased them and thieving at all times.

"Why do you leave the harrows out in the weather to rust?" Philip asked Old Abe as they stumbled over one in a field. It had been there long enough to be covered with morning glory vines and grass had grown over it in thick mats.

"'Taint' gwine ter hurt the harrow," the old man explained, "it's gwine ter do it good. The timber in all them boughten impelments needs weatherin' an' what rus' fawms on the pints er the harrow jes' preserves 'em. That there rus' is jes' as good ter preserve them harrow pints as a coat er paint."

Philip smiled and Old Abe congratulated himself that he was able to impart some wisdom to the young man who had taken such a superior tone with him. The old man was rather pleased that Mam' Peachy was to be dethroned. He had been under the thumb of his powerful mother for so long that it would be pleasant to know that no longer was she to be the boss of The Hedges. He was desperately afraid of his mother, but she could hardly blame this affair

on him. If she was going to work any of her charms she would naturally work them on the young master.

Suppose it was so—what Betsy had said about her brother's being able to work better charms than Mam' Peachy! The rumor had gone forth that she had said so. Someone had overheard it and it had spread like wildfire over the place. For his part Old Abe had never heard of a white man's working charms, but then, white folks were mighty peculiar. Philip —Mr. Philip—had been away four years and he had come back with a mighty independent way with him. He didn't seem to be in the least afraid of the dread Mam' Peachy. He even wanted her to know what he intended to do about the management of the farm. Was he so scornful of her and her charms because he could do better ones? The old man scratched his head and gazed at his young master. Perhaps it would be safer to throw in his lot with the stronger.

"How many hands does my father employ regularly?" Philip asked.

They had climbed to the top of a hill which was planted in corn, following a path by the fence. Below the hill stretched flat, grassy fields which bordered the river.

"Well, in co'se I's reglar an' Young Abe an' Lil' Abe; then thar's Jim Strong, what was kinder married ter my gal Sukey, an' his son Jeemes. That's all what we has ter say on the steady pay roll."

"What are they all doing right now—to-day?"

"Well, Young Abe air kinder po'ly with a tooth what done been botherin' him off an' on fer nigh on ter thirty years. I 'member it wa' befo' I jined the chu'ch he had the fust beginnin' er pangs an' he wan't mo'n about twenty-five then. He air the skeerdes' nigger I ever seed 'bout that there tooth. He done swo' up an' down 'tain't the same tooth, but I tell you, Phup—Mr. Phup—Young Abe ain't ter say right bright 'bout tellin' the diffunce in his teeth."

"What is he doing for it?"

"Mam' Peachy done fixed up a cha'm poultice, but his wife done 'lowed she's gonter fetch him over ter the blacksmith an' have it pulled. She's wo' out with his gruntin' an' groanin'."

"Where are the other hands?" asked Philip, patiently.

"Well, Lil' Abe an' Jeemes air done tuck the clay-bank mule over ter the Co't House ter git him shoed."

"Why did both of them go?"

"Laws-a-mussy, Mr. Phup! I cyarn't trus' them ter go all by theyselves. They's good enough boys on the whole, but they's better when they's got one another ter spy on them."

"And Jim Strong? Where is he?"

"He's a seekin' an' th'ain't no wuck in him till he comes through or don't come through. My Sukey done tol' him time an' agin ter wait till Big Meetin' time, but the notion tuck him an' he went ter seekin' las' week. He ain't never gonter come through. I done seed him try too many times ter take no stock in that nigger's ever landin' in the mo'ners' bench. I tell you, Mr. Phup, he got too big er mouth ever to go through the appinted time 'thout ever bus'in' out larfin'. I done seed him go up till the very las' hour an' then sompen done tickle him an' he open up he big mouth an' holler an' larf hisself back in ter sin."

Philip laughed outright. He remembered of old the desperate "seeking" of the grinning Jim Strong and the impossibility of his "coming through" because of the fact that laugh he must and one laugh while "seeking" put one out of the running.

"Well, you tell Jim to report to me, and I will give him some ploughing to do to keep him

so busy he won't have time to laugh. I can't see any reason for his neglecting his work while he is trying to be good."

"No, sir! 'Tain't no reason 'tall — 'cept'n when Jim air a-ploughin' he jes' nachully cusses an' cussin' air mos' as bad as carpin' to keep a po' sinner fum the Heavenly throne. Them there mules ain't got no 'ligion er they own an' they won't gee nor haw 'thout a few cuss words is so ter speak put in fer 'couragement."

"All right, then, far be it from me to discourage Jim's seeking! There is plenty of work besides ploughing. You send him to me!"

Philip's whirlwind method of going to work almost took Rolfe Bolling off his feet. After all, it did not make much difference to him, just so he was left in peace to sleep and eat and drink. It was rather pleasant not to have Old Abe come bothering him about the farm. Philip had tact enough to let his father alone and any trouble he had with the hands he kept to himself — and he had trouble enough to discourage a less patient man.

Many and baffling were the obstacles to overcome. He recognized Aunt Peachy's cunning hand in much that happened, but he quietly and intelligently downed each trouble that arose. First, he made the darkeys on the place respect

him, by showing kindly sympathy with them in any sickness or trouble that came to them. To be sure, he insisted upon a full day's work for full pay and called them to account sharply for time stolen from their work. He was rather astonished to find how easy it was to gain their allegiance and to overcome their feeling of superstitious loyalty to Mam' Peachy. What she commanded was no longer looked upon as law, to be obeyed willy-nilly. Old Abe had given up going to his mother for orders, and the younger generations kept away from her as much as possible. Her room, which was in the L behind the kitchen, was not besieged by old and young in search of charms for ailments as had been the case before Mr. Philip returned.

Young Abe's toothache had been the crucial test for the potency of the new regime at The Hedges. He had already given Mam' Peachy's charm poultice a fair trial, and when the young master had kindly asked to look at the tooth and had immediately injected something into the gum that sent a pleasing numbness through the suffering jaw, and then with no more ado than pulling out a splinter had deftly extracted the offending molar, absolutely without pain, Young Abe was sure Mr. Philip was a better charm worker than Aunt Peachy.

The next thing that happened firmly established Philip's supremacy in the minds of the colored contingent. It was the custom at The Hedges to cure great quantities of meat—much more than was needed by the family—because it was a well-known fact that Mam' Peachy's descendants must be fed, and when they needed a piece of salt pork, a fat back or maybe a shoulder, several young men were detailed to go over to the smokehouse belonging to Rolfe Bolling and simply help themselves. Mam' Peachy had instructed them for years in the ethics of this lifting. They must never take hams—unless for some special occasion. Shoulders, jowls, and fat backs were good enough for the likes of them. To be sure, the smokehouse was locked and the key kept carefully by the mistress, but keys and locks were small matters to Mam' Peachy's descendants.

It is not well for man to live on salt pork alone, so there were times when Elizabeth's henhouse was visited instead of the smokehouse. The theft of her poultry was the thing that distressed her even more than the loss of the pork, as the money she made from eggs and chickens was all that she had ever had to call her own.

Philip had been home only a few days when he installed electric burglar alarms on the

smokehouse door and the henhouse door. He said nothing about it even to his mother. In the night, the first one after the installation, the bell rang out sharply at about midnight. Philip sprang to his window, from which he had a good view of the smokehouse. In the moonlight he could plainly see two frightened negro youths standing spell-bound for a moment and then fleeing as though the devil himself were after them.

That incident placed Philip in the first rank of charm workers, and Mam' Peachy was forced to take a back seat.

The old woman hated him with a hatred as deadly as she did his mother, but she feared him, too. She tried desperately to reinstate herself with her own people. It was hard to have been paramount for a hundred years and then have a slip of a white man come and with a few simple, straightforward words and some toothache medicine and some silly little bells take all her prestige from her.

Sending all the colored children to school was the last blow. Education was something Mam' Peachy had fought persistently. She had tried in her early womanhood to learn to read, but in spite of her keen intelligence and powerful will she could not learn. Perhaps it was the fault

of her teacher, a young woman who was living at The Hedges at the time; or it may have been that the wild African strain was too strong in her veins for anything quite so civilized as the alphabet. At any rate, she could not learn, and conceit, which was one of her strongest characteristics, made her determine against education. If she, the all-powerful sorceress, could not learn to read and write, then reading and writing was foolishness and the persons who pretended to make head or tail of the alphabet were foolish.

Showing off was something Aunt Peachy scorned above everything. She declared that Philip was showing off in this business of sending all the colored children to school. For once she and Elizabeth were of one mind; that was concerning the education of the black race; but Elizabeth held her peace, loath to disagree in the slightest particular with her son. Aunt Peachy, however, loudly declaimed against the measure. She even gave out that she would work an evil spell against any child who attended school. Philip offered prizes to the children on the Bolling place for attendance and scholarship. His reward was more alluring than Aunt Peachy's threat, certain benefit pitted against vague disaster. The colored school was filled to overflowing.

Philip's mother could scarcely conceal her uneasiness over her son's methods. For so many years she had been trying to keep the peace and conciliate her husband and old Mam' Peachy, only coming out and fighting when a question such as her children's education or Betsy's having the proper school clothes was to be settled, that Philip's open warfare on dirt, ignorance and mismanagement made Elizabeth tremble.

"You don't know the old wretch as well as I do," she cautioned Philip. "There is no form of meanness or wickedness she is not capable of, and her influence over your father is as strong as ever."

"Yes, that is so, Mother, but remember she is very old and feeble and father doesn't really care much how the farm is run. I believe he rather likes to tease Aunt Peachy. Perhaps he is tired of having her boss him just as Old Abe is. My chief objection to the old woman is the way she snoops around. Sometimes she gets on my nerves when I find her right under my feet. Thank goodness, she never comes up here!"

Philip had fitted up a workshop in the attic, that being the one place where neither his father nor Aunt Peachy ever found their way. Here he kept his books and papers, his tools, and his

medicine chest, with the simple remedies recommended by Dr. Price to be given to the ailing darkeys, instead of the "charm poultices" and "yarb" teas with which Aunt Peachy had been accustomed to hold them in fearful subjection.

The attic extended over the whole house, but only a part of it had been floored over. It was dimly lighted by small windows, close up under the eaves, but Philip had cut a skylight in the roof and neatly fitted in a sash which gave him plenty of light and much better ventilation. The discarded furniture of past generations had been pushed back in the dark corners of the huge room. Stored on the unfloored rafters were many rare pieces of mahogany, broken and marred by rough usage but proclaiming their beauty to anyone who might hear the cry.

As a boy, Philip had heard the cry but he had not understood what it meant. He had always loved the attic, always found a certain rest and charm about the place. What it was he had not known. He had thought it was because there he had been able to get away from the disagreeable cackle and scandal of Aunt Peachy. He had not realized that it was not only the quiet of the place that rested his outraged ears but that certain lines of beauty delighted his unconscious eyes and were as potent as the silence in

restoring his sensitive nerves to normal poise.

Elizabeth loved the attic, too. When Philip was away from home during those long four years she used to creep up there and just sit and think, gazing into the dusty depths of the corners, vaguely determining that some day she would straighten things up, move everything and clean. She never had the time, however, which no doubt was just as well, as in her zeal she might have destroyed some of the charm of the place. As it was, she swept and scrubbed the floor every now and then, washed the little dusty windows and removed the cobwebs that the busy spiders festooned in the corners.

She had rubbed up some of the furniture a little with boiled oil and turpentine. An old highboy near a window had responded resplendently to her attentions. The light shone on its polished surface, bringing out the rich red of the mahogany and its fine rippling grain. On it, leaning against the wall, she had placed the portrait of the creator of the sunken garden.

Philip and his mother now came together to the attic for peace and quiet. Sometimes Betsy joined them there, but the place did not appeal so much to her joyous nature. She declared it was too spooky for her, although the skylight had helped it a little.

Lately Jo had begun to find his way to the retreat of his mother and brother. He would creep up quietly and watch Philip at work. But the person who loved the attic at The Hedges as much as either Philip or Elizabeth was the little neighbor, Rebecca Taylor. Whenever she felt sad and homesick for the studio in New York, for the old life there with her charming Daddy and the circle of pleasant friends, she would slip over the river by way of the coon bridge and knock on Mrs. Bolling's kitchen door.

And Rebecca always found an affectionate welcome when she came.

Chapter 12

AUNT PEARLY GATES' WISDOM

"Aunt Pearly Gates, do you mind being black all the way through? Sometimes, I wish I'd a' been born black and could come live down in your cabin with you and Uncle Si."

"Laws-a-mussy, Miss Becky baby, that ain't no way for 'ristocratical white chilluns ter talk. The good Gawd makes some of us black an' some of us white, but when you hear black folks longin' fer white hides or white folks longin' fer black hides 'tain't nothin' but the ol' Debble a' whisperin' in their hearts — the Debble er discontentment."

"Well, Aunt Pearly Gates, I wish God had been just a little gooder and made me either very white or very black."

"Now, honey chil', you stay in out the weather some an' if you's bleeged ter go out put on yo' sunbonnet an' you won't be near so bluenettish. How you 'spect ter be fa' as a lily if you go bare-haided right out in the sun an' win'?"

"But, Aunt Pearly Gates, you have been in out of the weather for years and years —"

"Pretty nigh twenty!"

"And you haven't bleached a bit," continued Rebecca.

"But I's born dyed-in-the-wool black. Th'ain't nothin' gonter change me but I 'low if'n you stays in the house a spell, leastways puts on yo' bonnet, you'll git as white as a 'tater sprout in no time. Why don' you let ol' Pearly Gates wuck some button holes in the top er yo' sunbonnet an' plait yo' hair through the holes? Then, when you gits ter itchin ter snatch off yo' bonnet it'll be a unpossumbility 'thout you take down yo' hair."

Rebecca happily agreed to her old friend's plan. She untied the despised gingham sunbonnet from about her neck and handed it to Aunt Pearly Gates. She was obliged to wear a sunbonnet but, as a rule, it was worn hanging down her back. She watched curiously while the old negress cut slits in the top of the bonnet and then with deft fingers worked button holes with neat, even stitches. For twenty years Aunt Pearly Gates had been bed-ridden, but in the whole county there was no person, black or white, more industrious than she. She was never idle for a moment. Even in the dark, through long, sleepless nights, the old hands were busy either knitting or tatting.

"I ain't got nothin' but time an' I sho' ain't a gonter was'e none er that," she would say. "When han's is got ter do the wuck of han's an' feet too, they is fo'ced ter labor overtime. I don' need much sleep an' I of'en draps off when I'm a tattin'. I ain't never been able ter tell whether I tats in my sleep or not. Sometimes I thinks I does, 'cause they'll be a mighty big pile er trimmin' on the baid in the mawnin'. As fer knittin': One time I tu'ned a sock heel in my sleep. I knows I did 'cause I wa' a dreamin' an' my dream wa' all mixed up with that there sock heel. It seemed lak little Miss Beck baby an' me wa' knittin' a tremenjous sock. Back an' fo'th we went, pretty nigh over the whole place as fur down as the Rapidan an' it seemed lak the business of the fambly wa' kinder mixed up in our stitches an a lot depended on how we tu'ned the heel. An' Miss Beck baby, by the time we got ter the heel, tuk the needles out'n my han's an', fo' Gawd, she tu'ned as pretty a heel as you ever seed! Jes' then I woke up an' bless Bob but it wa' daylight an' the heel er the sock wa' finished an' I wa' on the downward road to'ads the toe. An' Si Johnson wa' a fussin' an' grumblin' 'ca'se he said I wa' a clickin' needles all night a interruptin' er his slumbers. So, I knows I knits in my sleep."

The buttonholes were finished and Rebecca's dark hair pulled through and braided. The little girl stood patiently while the old woman gently smoothed her hair.

"I been a layin' by ter git Brer Johnson ter trade in some er this here tattin' fer a bresh ter keep down here jes' fer yo' hair, Miss Beck baby. If yo' hair'd git mo' 'tention it wouldn't hurt none. Who fixes it fer you of a mornin'?"

"Aunt Evelyn does it sometimes and sometimes Aunt Myra but sometimes I just kind of slap it with a brush myself and run along quick before either one of them remembers me. Aunt Evelyn digs into my head something awful, Aunt Pearly Gates, just like she was doing something she didn't want to do a bit, but felt somehow she must do it to keep from going to the bad place. I can see her face in the mirror over my head and it looks so queer and hard—not pretty the way she is sometimes. When Aunt Myra does my hair she stands 'way off from me and picks up the comb just like it was a snake, or something horrid, and then she dabs at me and seems to be trying not to touch my hair any more than she can help—kind of like it was a greasy dishrag or something nasty. What makes them hate me so, Aunt Pearly Gates?"

"Lord love us, chil'! They don't ter say hate you," answered the old woman, with a note of sadness in her rich, soft voice. "You mustn't git no sich a notion."

"But they do! They hate me and Uncle Spot hates me. I think he hates me worst of all. He never says anything cross to me, but when he helps me to ham I have a feeling that he can't decide whether he'd rather give me a little bit, so little that I'll starve to death or so much that I'll make myself sick eating it. He usually gives me too much and when Aunt Evelyn tells him so he smiles a kind of hard smile. I think Uncle Spot is *so* handsome and I'd rather he'd like me than anybody but I don't know what to do to make him feel differently. He never even looks at me. I've been here three whole months and I don't know my aunts and uncle any better than I did the day I came."

"Does you try ter make 'em take a likin' ter you?"

"Ye-es—I try a little bit."

"Does yer love Miss Myra an' Miss Evelyn the way you wants 'em ter love you?" asked Aunt Pearly Gates.

"They hated me so from the very first, Aunt Pearly Gates. I didn't do anything to make them hate me. They just did it."

"But is you done nothin' ter 'suade 'em ter stop a hatin' of you."

"I don't know what to do. I don't have to do anything to Grandfather. He just naturally likes me. I believe he liked me because I sassed him and because he can't tease me. I tease him back every time and then he and I laugh and laugh and Aunt Evelyn and Aunt Myra look like somebody had talked out loud in church or something and Uncle Spot gets up and leaves the room. It seems to tease them when Grandfather and I have a joke that they can't see. Sometimes we just pretend to have a joke. That's the best joke we have. Grandfather always starts that joke when the family get kind of stuffy and stupid and dignified. We made Aunt Evelyn cry the other day. She thought the joke was on her and there wasn't any joke at all!"

Aunt Pearly Gates looked sad, put down her needles and gazed attentively into the dimpling little brown face.

"Honey baby, don't you know the good Gawd is sent you here ter make happiness instid er misery? Jokes is fine and lots er happiness comes through jokes but not jokes what makes other folks cry. S'pose the joke had been on you. Would you had er liked that much?"

"But I would have seen it and laughed. My aunts can't ever see the joke. Then they blame me because they are afraid of Grandfather and as soon as his back is turned they pick on me.

"If there was any fun in their picking I wouldn't mind a bit but they are just hard and cold and mean. They raise their eyebrows and talk about how blond all true Taylors are, and how well grown, and what a misfortune it would be to be born small and dark. Of course they want me to understand that they do not really believe I am their brother's child. That's kind of hard because—because they mean to say something about my poor little mother. They don't say it right out, but I can see they mean unkind things."

Aunt Pearly Gates looked distressed. She resumed her knitting, adroitly picking up a dropped stitch.

"You ain't never answered my question, honey baby: Does you love Miss Myra and Miss Evelyn the way you wants them ter love you? Does you sho' 'nough keer whether they loves you or not? I'm a old, old ooman, Miss Beck baby, and I's took a heap er notice er folks in my time an' I ain't never seen hate all on one side. I ain't a sayin' they didn't start it in the fust beginning but what I is a sayin' is

that the way ter stop folks a hatin' you is stop a hatin' them. I's been a' watchin' you all this summer an' a hopin' you wa' a gonter fin' out a way ter git on better with po' Miss Myra an' Miss Evelyn."

"They are not as poor as I am," pouted Rebecca.

"Yes, they is, chil'., They's po' 'cause they ain't never learned how ter wuck none, they nor they ma befo' 'em. They don't know nothin' 'bout the joy of 'complishin' something an' they air got sluggerish minds an' I reckon they ain't never enjyed a good larf sence they wa' babies and somebody tickled they toes."

"That's kind of sad but they needn't get so sore when Grandfather and I are getting our toes tickled now. So many things are funny and when nothing funny is happening at the moment one can always think about something funny that has happened," protested Rebecca.

"You ain't never answered my question yit, honey baby."

"You mean about loving them if I expect them to love me? How can I love people who are always putting me in the wrong? I never do anything to suit them?"

"Do they make out to suit you none?"

"We-e-ll, no, not exactly! But, Aunt Pearly

Gates, they are older than I am."

"Why, chil', age ain't got a mite ter do with gittin' along with folks. Look at ol' Marse Bob! He air ol' enough ter git along if age'll do it. It air plain common sense mixed with a good, kin' heart that puts up with other folkses' failin's that does the wuck. Not that Marse Bob ain't got mo' sense than mos' folks an' his heart is kin', too, but he air so imtolerant to'ds folks what ain't got as much sense as he am. He done made a joke er the whole cremation an' it looks lak it done kinder et in on his soul. He allus tuck out his spleen a teasin' folks. He allus wa' a teasin' pusson from the time he wa' a boy. He teased his ma an' his pa. He teased all the niggers on the place an' even the animules, though he loved 'em all an' they loved him. When he married Miss Evy Spottswood, yo' gran'ma what was, he'd tease her till she'd cry an' then he'd tease her some mo'. I hearn him with my own years a teasin' her on her death bed. That wa' twenty years ago, jes' befo' my lim's played out on me."

"Didn't he love her, Aunt Pearly Gates?" asked Rebecca in big-eyed wonderment.

"Sho' he loved her, but teasin' air allus been the bref er life ter Marse Bob. He didn't mean no harm, but Miss Evy wa' too easy ter tease.

Same way wif all the chilluns, 'ceptin' yo' pa, Marse Tom. Nothin' couldn't tease Marse Tom. He'd jes' larf an' tu'n the joke on him. I reckon tha's why he tho't mo' er Marse Tom than any o' the res' er his chilluns. That's how come he tuck on so when yo' pa lef' Virginny an' went off ter them furren parts up to Noo York. He ain't never stopped a missin' him."

"Did my father tease people, too?"

"An' that he didn't! He useter crack plenty er jokes, but they wa' allus the kinder jokes what made folks laugh *wif* him. Yo' grampa air allus a laughin' *at* folks instead er *wif* 'em. Now, honey baby, Ol' Aunt Pearly Gates air got a notion in her fool ol' haid that yo' is gonter make things kinder happier down here at Mill House. Yo' mus'n' be too much lak yo' grampa, but try ter be mo' lak yo' pa. I ain't a throwin' no sticks at Marse Bob an' I see all he virtues. You mus' copy 'em, Miss Beck baby, an' let all the faults go by. You is done made the ol' man happier by comin'. Now try an' make all the others happy, too."

"Yes, Aunt Pearly Gates, I'll try, but you must tell me where to begin," said Rebecca, solemnly.

"That's yo' pa's own chil'," approved the old woman. "Begin at the fust beginnin'. When

we want folks ter lak us we begins by doin' 'em a kin'ness. Now I ain't up ter the gret house an' I ain't able ter say jes' what them kindnesses ought ter be, but they is sholy sumpen a nice lil' gal kin do ter make life brighter fer two po' ladies what ain't got nothin' ter do on Gawd's green yearth but set aroun' an' complain. Is you talked ter them much?"

"No! I never know what to talk about. I tried at first, because Mrs. O'Shea used to tell me I must try to be entertaining, but they were so shocked by everything I said I just stopped and let off steam on Grandfather. He is always glad to listen to me."

"Then, chil', you mus' fin' something what ain' shockin' ter they squeamy years. Fin' out what is mos' interestin' ter them an' talk about them things. You try it, baby, an' come see ol' Pearly Gates to-morrer an' tell her all about it. I mought have a s'prise fer you by then, anyhow."

Chapter 13

SPOTTSWOOD CAPITULATES

The first Taylors had always dined at noon — the logical time for man and beast to leave off work for rest and refreshment — but each high-born lady who had married into the family had succeeded in pushing the dinner hour back a little until at the time of Rebecca's advent the dinner hour was at half-after-two. Spottswood grumbled at the lateness of this meal, as it did not fit in at all with a farmer's day, but the ladies of the household contended that it was the height of vulgarity to dine earlier and even wanted Aunt Testy to change the hour to three o'clock, but half-after-two suited Aunt Testy and half-after-two it remained.

Miss Evelyn and Miss Myra could cite many instances to show that three was the hour of dining for all true aristocrats. At noon, when the farm bells throughout the countryside pealed forth the glad tidings that the hour of rest and food had come, they felt a certain satisfaction that they were not as others were. Their farm bell did not ring. To be sure, hands must be

fed at noon and their brother always came in from the fields for a snack, but the cue was given by the Bollings' great bell across the river, or by the hub factory's shrill whistle.

Rebecca found it difficult to adjust herself to this dinner hour. In her Bohemian life what dining she had done had been somewhere between six and seven o'clock, with luncheon between twelve and one. When she first came to Mill House the time between breakfast and dinner had seemed interminable, but she had learned of the snack her uncle was accustomed to have at noon and had formed a habit of coming to Aunt Testy at the same time for a pone of hot corn bread and a mug of fresh buttermilk. She was careful not to be in Spot's way, however, realizing that her presence was distasteful to him. He usually had his snack at a table on the long back porch which separated the outside kitchen from the rest of the house. Rebecca, with her mug of buttermilk fresh from the churn, with delectable bits of butter floating around in it, and her great crisp corn pone, would seat herself on the lower porch step. The only thing to mar her happiness was the lack of companionship during this luncheon. She could hear the hands laughing and talking in the kitchen, where Aunt Testy

was giving them their mid-day meal, and she could see the stalwart back of her silent uncle as he sat at the table at the end of the porch. She often wished she had been "born black" and could join the hands in the kitchen. They would have talked to her, and no doubt welcomed her with pleasure. Certainly they would not have ignored her as her uncle persisted in doing.

She wondered sometimes if he was really unaware of her presence. He never looked at her, but divided his attention between his food and his dog, Doctor, a Llewellyn setter, who was his constant companion. Doctor enjoyed this snack on the porch, as at no other meal could he come to table with his master, the ladies of the house being strict about dogs being allowed in the house. Doctor would sit by Spot's side, his plume-like tail spread out on the floor, and at every mark of attention from his master, either an affectionate pat or a bit of food, he would sweep the porch with a vigorous wagging. Sometimes the tidbits would come too slowly for his liking, and then he would place his paw imploringly on Spot's knee and the expression in his eyes would have melted the heart of a hanging judge.

Doctor was a man's dog and a one man's dog

at that. He was devoted to his master and his master alone. He tolerated other males, but made no advances toward them, and he simply ignored females. Rebecca, when she first came to live with her grandfather, had felt a little afraid of the big dog. She shrank instinctively from him if he passed near her. She had never had a pet in the studio and her only acquaintance with animals had been through the bars of the zoo. Life on the farm had thrown her in contact with many kinds of live creatures and gradually all fear of them left her. She was learning to drive the horses and milk the cows. A setting goose had no terrors for her and she faced with equanimity the huge, strutting white turkey gobbler, even when he made the most pompous noises and advanced towards her scraping his wings on the ground.

Little by little Rebecca made friends with all the creatures, all but Doctor. He seemed to have taken his cue from his master and passed her by with scornful disdain. The proud spirit that kept the girl from forcing her presence on the man deterred her from even so much as putting her hand on the dog's silky head, although she longed to do it. He was a beautiful dog, with long silver-white fur, spotted in glossy black. What a delightful thing it would be to

have a companion like Doctor when she roamed around the place! There would be no more lonesome times then. Now there *were* lonesome times, in spite of the many visits to Aunt Pearly Gates and the long, intimate talks she had with Major Taylor in the evening; in spite of the new friends she had made among the dumb creatures on the farm and the kindness shown her by all of the colored people employed by her grandfather.

Rebecca loved the country life, but there were times when she longed for the merry old days in the studio, with the talky parties. She longed for the excitement of the crowded New York streets, for the life, color, camaraderie of the artists' quarter where her years had been spent. She longed for Mrs. O'Shea, and the many tales of dire misfortune that had befallen her and her family. Above all, she longed for the dear man whom she had called Daddy, who had been to her such a charming companion, counselor and guide.

Rebecca was devoted to her grandfather, whose affection for her was evident to all, but she had seen little of him for the last six weeks. He was engrossed with business at the hub factory, sometimes not even coming home for the sacred rite of the half-after-two dinner. When

he was at home he seemed worried and harassed, although his kindness and concern for Rebecca never flagged. The more his business harried him the more Major Taylor teased his son and daughters. They, in consequence, could barely conceal their satisfaction on the days in which the hub factory made it impossible for him to come home for dinner.

Those were sad days for Rebecca. Then the aunts corrected her to their hearts' content. It made no change in her uncle's manner, however. He still ignored her, as he did in his father's presence.

What Aunt Pearly Gates had said to Rebecca in regard to her relations with Mill House folks had made a deep impression on the little girl. She determined to try the old woman's kindly plan and endeavor to make herself more agreeable to them.

"First, I must decide what to talk about that will interest them, and I must be sure not to shock them. I must do all the things the aunts make a point of, and I mustn't do any of the things they don't like. As for Uncle Spot, I guess he'll be the hardest of all," she said to herself, as she walked slowly home from Aunt Pearly Gates' cabin, after her talk with her.

The farm bell at The Hedges tolled for the

noon rest and the whistle at the hub factory blew a shrill blast. Rebecca hastened on her way. She fancied she could smell the good corn pone that Aunt Testy would have ready for her, split open and dripping with fresh, sweet butter. Dr. Price's prescription had brought health to the little waif, and with health had come the appetite of a field hand. Rebecca liked to arrive at the back porch a little before her Uncle Spot. She always hoped he would notice her as he passed her on the steps. He never did, but she took a certain satisfaction in his nearness as he went up, two at a time, and crossed the porch to the tin basin that was always on the bench by the wall, right under the shelf where stood the brass-rimmed cedar water bucket, with its gourd dipper. He always did exactly the same thing every day. He dipped out three dippers full of water, and then, stooping his great height to the low bench, he washed his hands and face, using the strong turpentine soap that was in a broken saucer by the basin.

Rebecca loved to look at his broad back as he leaned to the bench. She liked to see the way he spread his legs as he stooped—such strong, finely shaped legs! She wished she could draw, or model in clay, so she could in some way

express what the lines of the young man meant to her artistic sense. She liked the smell of the turpentine soap. It brought back, in an indefinable way, scenes of her babyhood when her father was painting the portrait of her mother. Above all, she liked the strange gurgling noise Spot made when he washed his face with great hands-full of water. She liked the noise so much that she had tried to imitate it when washing her own face in the china basin in her room, but Aunt Myra had heard her and sternly rebuked such vulgarity, and she had not attempted it again in her basin—but had been quite successful in the spring down in the cow pasture!

On this day Rebecca got safely to her seat on the top step before Spot arrived and had the satisfaction of seeing him swing around the corner of the house, his blue shirt open at the throat, Doctor following close to heel. Spot's hat was in his hand and his yellow hair was gleaming in the sun like ripe wheat. How could anyone look so like her father and be so different?

Her uncle *did* look at her in passing, and there was an amused expression on his countenance. What made him smile? Suddenly she remembered that her hair was plaited through

the buttonholes in the top of her bonnet! She put up her hand and felt the thick rope of hair. Anyhow, it had made her keep her bonnet on better than ever before. Surely the aunts would approve, even if the uncle found food for merriment in it.

As Doctor passed her she put out a tentative hand to stroke his silken back. He submitted to the caress with lordly indifference, but he did turn his head and look at her with something like toleration in his hazel eyes. She was almost happy. She watched Spot go through his ablutions. Maybe this would be a good time to try to talk to him! He stood with his feet far apart as he leaned over the basin and made a nice gurgly noise down in the water. Then he gave his face a vigorous rubbing on the roller towel.

"Uncle Spot, did you ever see a giraffe drink? He spraddles his legs out just the way you do, because you see his legs are longer than his neck."

Spottswood stopped drying his face for a moment and looked at Rebecca in amazement. What business had she talking to him? Impertinent little minx! Why should she hang around him when he was having his snack? Why should she put her hand on his dog? He resented the fact that Doctor had submitted to the caress

with as much grace as he had shown. What was all this talk of giraffes and the way they drank?

"I have seen giraffes lots of times, but never noticed the way they drank until I saw a movie of some animals in the jungle," Rebecca continued. "It was a picture of a drinking hole during a great drouth when all the animals came to drink. Kipling tells about a drinking hole in one of his stories. When I saw the movie it made me understand Kipling better."

Spot scowled and turned his back. If this talk was to keep up he would have Aunt Testy take his food into the dining room and give up the back porch to the interloper. And Rebecca, serenely unconscious, chattered on.

"That movie of the jungle animals made me very sad. It seems *terrible* to snare them and place them in captivity. There was one great hyena that dragged the trap that had sprung on him for miles and miles until he was so exhausted it almost broke my heart and then he was put in a cage and brought to New York. You can see him now up at the Bronx Zoo."

Aunt Testy appeared with a tray of food, to break Spot's silence, handing Rebecca a plate of hot corn bread and a mug of cold buttermilk, and taking a similar repast to the table for her young master. She then waddled back to her

kitchen to dish up the noon dinner for the field hands.

Rebecca took a delicate bite of the steaming pone, and a gulp of buttermilk to allay the heat. Spot sat at his table, his eyes fixed on his corn bread, which was too hot to tackle. Doctor put an imploring paw on his knee, but he did not get his usual pat or word of commendation. Doctor was out of favor with his master for having submitted to the caress of the interloper.

"Do you believe in prayer, Uncle Spot? I mean in the direct answer to prayer. Daddy used to say there was lots of difference in believing in prayer and believing in the direct answer to it."

Mr. Spottswood Taylor had taken a great mouthful of hot corn pone, and Rebecca hoped that was the reason he did not deign a reply to her searching question.

"I used to believe with all my heart," Rebecca rattled on. "After I saw the hyena in Bronx Zoo that I had seen in the movies I began to pray that God would let him loose. I began to pray that God would let all the animals out of Central Park Zoo and the Bronx Zoo, too! I prayed and prayed and I was sure God would answer my prayers. Then, all of a sudden, I began to scream in the night because

I suddenly remembered that some of the animals wouldn't understand and they might eat up all the little children in New York—including me—but I felt I deserved to be eaten up for praying such a thoughtless prayer. I couldn't help thinking it was something of a joke on me, too, and then I got to laughing until I had regular hysterics and Daddy had to give me aromatic ammonia and explain that the efficacy of prayer didn't mean granting prayers like that."

Rebecca looked at Spottswood Taylor intently to see if he had been interested. Her chagrin was intense when she saw him get up from his seat and carry his plate of food into the dining room. He came back for the pitcher of buttermilk. A wicked desire to tease him then took possession of the little girl. Her Grandfather's spirit was asserting itself.

"The giraffe doesn't like to share his drinking hole with the other animals, either, Uncle Spot," she said. "In the movie I saw, when he got ready to drink he went around with his long legs busy kicking all of the smaller animals out of the way. He wanted plenty of room to drink in. I fancy if there had been another drinking hole he would have gone there, but as it was he just had to drink before all the other

creatures, and perhaps they laughed at him for having to spraddle his legs out so far."

Rebecca raised her voice, to make sure Spot heard her last words. He was gone and the door to the dining room was closed with a bang. Then the little girl put her head in her lap and wept bitterly.

Doctor had followed his master to the door, somewhat dazed by his behavior. Why should he leave him without word or look and why should his share of the delectable corn pone be denied him. He stood by the door a moment, waving his tail to and fro. Once he raised his paw and scratched gently for admittance, or at least an explanation. He listened, head a bit on one side. Then he looked at Rebecca. She was sobbing, her face buried in her hands and her slender form a little huddled heap of misery. The dog walked slowly towards her and then, with the strange sympathy that dogs often feel and show to mankind in distress, he thrust his soft nose between her hands and tear-stained face and gently muzzled her under her sunbonnet, licking her tears away as though he liked the salty taste.

Rebecca's sobs ceased.

"Oh, Doctor, Doctor! What a perfect gentleman you are!" she breathed. "Won't you

love me just a little?" The dog raised his paw and put it against her breast.

"Here—you can have all my corn bread. I am too full of emotion for solid food. I'll drink the buttermilk."

The dog licked the platter clean and the child drained the glass. Then together they raced around the house and down to the river bank. They had much to tell each other.

Rebecca and Doctor had a never-to-be-forgotten, but often to be repeated, time together down by the riverside. Doctor was like some man who had passed the period of puppy love without being even exposed to the malady, but who, in sober middle-age, had caught the disease and was taking it harder than he would had he had it in his youth. His master's conversation was good enough in its way, but it was nothing to the endearing baby-talk Rebecca was pouring into his twitching, silken ears. A masculine pat was about all he ever got from Spottswood, but this adorable girl was fondling him, rubbing his nose, scratching his throat and picking burrs out of his fur. He was particularly grateful that she found a tick that was burying itself on top of his tail, right at the root, where no dog ever can quite reach with either paw or tooth.

They sat on the river bank a long time. Re-

becca felt happier than she had since the death of her dear Daddy. She was sorry her attempt to make friends with her uncle had failed, but the love of a dog like Doctor was much more to be desired than mere toleration from a man like her Uncle Spot, even though he did look like a young, sun-burned Greek god.

"Doctor, you have more temperament than Uncle Spot, and I think you and I are soul mates," chuckled the little girl.

Doctor wagged his tail and gave Rebecca's neck an ecstatic lick, under the curtain of the sunbonnet which she was still wearing, thanks to Aunt Pearly Gates' device.

"Do you know, Doctor, I am afraid it is almost time for that old dinner to be served. Are you hungry? I'm not a bit, although I didn't eat my corn pone. We mustn't be late, because to-day is the day I am trying to make my relations love me. It is certainly up-hill work. Grandfather is not coming home to dinner to-day, because I heard him tell Aunt Testy to send him some lunch by Willie Bell, and I'll bet anything the aunts will pick on me for everything I've done wrong and all the things I might do wrong. I wish my stomach kept better time, Doctor. It never tells me when dinner is ready. Come, let's race!"

Dinner was ready — more than ready. Aunt Testy had held it back a few minutes in the hope that Rebecca would come in time to miss the stern reprimands she was sure to get from the Misses Taylor.

"Miss Myra an' Miss Evelyn ain't got nothin' on Gawd's green yearth ter do but pick on that lamb," she muttered as she brought in the dinner. The clock hands pointed to ten minutes to three, and the ladies were evidently impatient. Spottswood still was irritated over the occurrence at noon. He wondered where his dog was, too; had missed him and whistled for him repeatedly.

"Dinner is late enough," he grumbled, as he took his seat at the foot of the table.

"Hush! Testy will hear you!" exclaimed his sisters.

"Well, why shouldn't she hear me?" he asked.

"Testy doesn't like criticism," answered Myra.

"Neither do any of us, but we have to put up with it occasionally."

"Where is Rebecca?" asked Evelyn. "She is such a trial! We ask only a few things of her, but she makes no attempt to comply with our wishes. I am sure she is no kin to us at all. As a family all of us are prompt."

"Lil' Marse Tom useter fergit sometime, spe-

cial when he done fill up on cawn pone an' buttermilk not so long befo'," said Aunt Testy, coming into the dining room in time to hear Miss Evelyn's remark concerning the promptitude of the Taylors.

"Father used to be strict enough with us when we were children about being on time," said Myra. "I remember very well we were allowed no butter for breakfast unless we got in our seats before the last stroke of eight. But he seems to be simply possessed by this wretched child. What he sees in her I can't imagine—ugly, scrawny, little black thing!"

"He sees his own flesh an' blood in her—that's what Marse Bob sees! She ain't no po' kin, neither," exclaimed Aunt Testy, indignation in every curve of her comfortable person. She put the platter of fried chicken down in front of Spot and flounced out of the room. In a moment she was back bearing a tray of vegetables which she placed on the table without a word, but with ominous mutterings proceeding from her chest, like rumblings of thunder presaging a storm.

"Yonder she air now!" cried Aunt Testy, looking out of the window. "Jes' a-runnin' fer dear life—but Gawd he'p us if Doctor ain't a-runnin' arfter her. He's gone mad! I's sho'

he's gone mad! Doctor am too proudified ter run 'less'n he done gone an' got bit by a mad dog. Look at him jes' a-jumpin' up an' actin' lak a pup! Lawd love us, Marse Spot, go 'ten' ter Doctor! Don't set thar an' let that po' lil' Beck baby git all bit ter pieces."

Spottswood jumped from his chair and rushed to the front porch in time to see his dignified old setter roll on the grass with Rebecca in a final romp. For a moment he was frozen to the spot with horror. His dog was mad and was going to tear the child to pieces! Poor little waif! She wasn't such a bad kid after all. Of course she was an impostor, but no doubt she was ignorant of it. She had been imposed upon by those people in New York who wanted to get rid of her. This flashed through Spottswood's mind in the instant that he stood inactive. Then he dashed down the steps and grabbed his dog by the collar, dragging him from Rebecca, who lay on the ground looking up at him with her great eyes full of laughter.

Doctor was the only one who was ashamed. He looked crestfallen enough at being caught by his master romping. With a loving glance at Rebecca he slunk around the house, his proud tail for once between his legs. Had he been discovered stealing chickens or devouring the birds

after a day's shooting he could not have looked more guilty.

Without a word Spottswood went back to his dinner.

"Hurry up, honey, baby! Yo' dinner am ready an' waitin' an' Miss Myra an' Miss Evelyn air lookin' moughty stiff backed," Aunt Testy called from the porch in a sibilant whisper. "Run take off yo' bonnet, chil', an' smoove yo' har."

Rebecca raced to her room, intent on propitiating the aunts. It was too bad to be late to dinner on the very day that she had planned to be so virtuous. She untied the strings and tried to take off her bonnet, but Aunt Pearly Gates' device was working to perfection. There was no removing the bonnet without first unplaiting the rope of hair. She made a desperate attempt to untie the piece of yarn with which the end of her braid was fastened, but the curly tendrils of her hair had wrapped themselves around the yarn and remove it she could not. Her fingers seemed to be all thumbs and she fumbled desperately. Grabbing up the scissors, she cut off the end. Surely, the unplaiting would not be so difficult now! But it would not undo, no matter how hard she tried. Rolling on the ground with Doctor had put tangles in the

unruly curls that would take untiring patience to unravel. Desperate at the delay, Rebecca grabbed the scissors again and cut the braid close up to the buttonholes in the bonnet.

"The Gordian knot!" she cried as she tossed the bonnet and braid onto the bed and without looking in the glass to view the havoc she had made, she flew down the steps and slid into her place at the table.

Spottswood, being the carver, usually helped Rebecca to whatever meat he was serving without addressing her and without even glancing at her, but on that day he could not resist a curiosity he felt to look at the young person who had succeeded in breaking through the dignity of his dog. It came to his mind, too, that perhaps, being a child, Rebecca might like a gizzard. He started to put one on her plate, but changed his mind. He helped her plentifully, however, and then raised his eyes and for the first time since the girl had come to Mill House he looked at her fairly and squarely. Then a strange thing came to pass: Spottswood Taylor burst out into uncontrollable laughter.

The Misses Taylor were astonished. They had never heard Spot laugh so heartily. An occasional grim smile was about all they had ever known him indulge in. They, too, had

made it a rule not to look at their so-called niece unless it was positively necessary to correct her about something. Coldly to avert their eyes seemed to them to be the most aristocratic way to express their disapproval. This getting late to dinner was cause enough to have them withdraw the honor of their glances for a long period. When their brother burst into such merriment they involuntarily looked in the direction in which he was looking.

Then the ladies laughed, too, though not quite so uproariously as their brother. Rebecca's appearance was certainly funny. Her hair, where she had cut the braid, was standing up in a most ferocious-looking bush.

"Oh!" she cried, putting her hand up to her hair, and trying to smooth down the unruly bush, "I was in such a hurry I had to cut it off," she faltered. "It was plaited through buttonholes in my bonnet. Aunt Pearly Gates fixed it for me, so I could keep on my bonnet and try to get to be more Taylorish in my complexion. I hated so to be late for dinner, but my stomach was slow to-day—owing to—owing to—"

She could say no more. This was a new thing, to be the only one who was not laughing. It was very uncomfortable, too, to be so funny looking that persons who went for months with-

out cracking a smile should be sending forth peal after peal of laughter. It was all she could do to keep back the tears.

Aunt Testy came in and with one glance at Rebecca she gave a deep chuckle.

"Good Gawd, honey baby, what yo' done did ter yo'se'f? You looks lak that there eat-'em-alive wil' man in the circus."

Rebecca took a tight hold on her emotions and to her mind came the thought: "Now is the time for me to show I can take a joke on myself! I have been laughing at people all the time, now I know how it is to be laughed at. I won't cry! I won't"

A little teary smile came to her countenance at her stern bidding and then she grinned a wee bit, and then the ridiculousness of the whole thing got the better of her and she, too, burst out laughing.

"Anyhow, they are going to forget to jump me for being late," she decided.

She reckoned without knowledge of the sense of duty on which her aunts prided themselves, however. As soon as they could control their laughter they started in on Rebecca.

"You are very late for dinner," admonished Myra.

"We ask very little of you in the way of duty

and obedience," continued Evelyn, "and getting to dinner in time is not much of a demand, surely, for us to make on one in—in your position."

"Certainly not!" chimed in Myra.

'You have succeeded in ruining what appearance you may have had," Evelyn kept on, in her sanctimonious drawl.

"Yes—I mean yes ma'm," Rebecca answered meekly. "It is too bad—I mean tow bad—I got so occupied—I did not know it was getting late—"

"You never see my sister or me late for a meal," Myra interrupted.

"Oh, hell! Why don't you women let the kid alone?" Spot broke out in a loud voice that made his sisters and Rebecca jump and Aunt Testy almost drop the apple dumpling she was bringing in from the kitchen. "Don't you want a gizzard, Rebecca?"

Rebecca could not speak for emotion, but she silently held out her plate for what seemed to her a sacred gizzard. This time her uncle looked at her squarely and searchingly. In the eyes of the child he saw an expression that reminded him vaguely of Doctor. It was one of trusting devotion.

As for Rebecca, she could gladly have stood

on her head in the corner and swallowed the gizzard whole, had her uncle required it of her. It seemed a profanation to eat the gizzard. She had at last made some kind of a dent in Spot's armor! As for the aunts, they would perhaps come around in time. She had the love of Doctor and the championship of Spottswood—great victories to have won in one day!

Rebecca had cut off her scalp lock so close that there was nothing to do but shingle her head. Bobbing was out of the question, and so Aunt Evelyn shingled on one side and Aunt Myra on the other. Their methods varied somewhat and the result was rather lopsided. In trying to even things up they cut closer and closer until Rebecca began to feel uneasy about her very scalp.

The ladies were much pleased with their prowess as barbers and complimented themselves inwardly on their strict adherence to duty. Certainly it was no pleasure to them to have to handle such black hair.

Rebecca thanked them humbly for having shorn her so successfully and hoped God would really temper the winter to her shingled pate. She was quite aghast when she peeped in her mirror after the shearing and saw her funny cropped head.

"Starting to school, too, next month! What will they think of me?" she asked herself. "Well, it doesn't really make much difference; because Doctor loves me and Uncle Spot gave me a gizzard."

Chapter 14

A VERY DARK INCUBATOR

The next morning Rebecca hurried through her dressing. She had scrubbed her head when she took her evening bath, having a vague idea that much watering might make her hair grow, as she had heard Spot complain that rainy weather made the weeds flourish. But, alas! morning revealed only a close-cropped black scalp, with here and there a tiny curl where the aunts' shears had missed a stray lock.

Smiling rather solemnly, Rebecca ran down to breakfast in a hurry. Never again would she be late! She stopped a minute to pet Doctor, who was standing with his head in the front door. He received her caresses with some embarrassment, but submitted with a bored air. She slipped into her place just as Aunt Evelyn asked the blessing.

All through breakfast Rebecca endeavored to catch Spottswood's eye. He did not look up from his plate or deign to speak a word to her. The aunts were still angry at the horrid word their brother had flung at them the day before

and haughtily refused to address a remark to him. Major Taylor had breakfasted early and gone to the factory, so breakfast was a silent feast.

As soon as possible Rebecca made her way sadly to Aunt Pearly Gates' cabin. Nothing had turned out as she had planned. She had only succeeded in angering the aunts and her uncle had slipped back into silence more dense than before. Doctor's love appeared not to have survived the night. Her hair, in which she had taken a secret pride, had been cut off.

Aunt Pearly Gates listened to Rebecca's troubles with deep sympathy. "Well, honey baby, things ain't so bad as you think. Yo' hair'll be growin' so fas' you cyarn't keep up with it an' befo' you know it you'll have another crap. Now you can fix it yo'se'f. You don't look so bad with short har lak some 'cause you is got a pretty haid. Bless me if'n I don't think it looks kinder lak Lil' Marse Tom's haid. Ain't none er them noticed that?"

"None of them ever notice anything about me but Grandfather and he is so busy with the factory just now I haven't seen him. He doesn't know what has happened to me yet."

"Well, I'll be boun', he'll have his joke on you, but he won't let nobody else pick on you."

"What I mind most is Doctor and Uncle Spot—just when I thought I had them liking me a little."

"Lawd love you, honey chil', that ain't nothin' ter be a worryin' yo' po' haid about. Doctor air a peculiar animule, jes' lak some men folks. He air gonter be runnin' arfter you, come night time, jes' so you don't 'pear too anxious lak. You jes' go by him with yo' nose up in the air an' he'll be breakin' his neck ter ketch up with you."

"But Uncle Spot!"

"He don't worry me none. I been layin' up here seein' too many springs a-comin' ter be botherin' my haid about po' Marse Spot. He done showed he got a sof' spot an' the winter in he heart air a-breakin' up. He mought freeze up off'n on agin, but the spring sunshine air sho' ter thaw him out agin. Marse Spot's redemption air as sho' as springtime."

Aunt Pearly Gates stopped knitting for a moment and looked keenly at the girl. "I got a s'prise fer you, honey chil'," she said, with a mysterious smile.

"Oh, that's nice!" answered Rebecca, politely. It would take a wonderful surprise indeed to lighten the gloom that enveloped her soul.

"'Tain't no common s'prise, an' it's been

a-keepin' me busy all night. Fact is, I 'low I is got 'bout fifteen s'prises fer you."

"Fifteen! Why Aunt Pearly Gates, what can it be?"

"Well, I done hatched out in the night. Fo'teen of 'em air done come th'ough an' I hear a lil' soun' under the kivers that done give me a feelin' that the las' an' the fifteenth air been a bawn."

The old woman put her hand carefully under the quilt and drew forth a little black chicken. A bit of shell was stuck to its head, giving it a comical resemblance to a clown in a white cap. She raised the corner of an old woolen skirt, covering a box on a chair beside her bed and immediately a deafening peeping began.

"Oh, please let me hold it," begged Rebecca, clapping her hands in delight. "I never saw anything so cute in my life. I didn't even know you were—er—er—setting, Aunt Pearly Gates."

The old woman smiled, delighted that her surprise had dispelled the sadness depicted on the child's face.

"Let the lil' chick'n git kinder useter livin' fust, honey baby, befo' you take ter fondlin' it; then you kin hol' it all you want jes' so's you don't squeeze it none. I 'lowed you didn' know

nothin' 'bout my havin' gone ter settin'. I kep' mighty quiet 'bout it, 'cause I is kinder tender in my feelin's when I's a-settin'. I don't want nobody ter be a arskin' me how many eggs I's got in the baid an' then kinder a-holdin' it over me when I don't have good luck 'bout the number er chick'ns I hatches out. I ain't a gonter take the blame er any no-'count rooster."

"Did you have good luck this time?"

"I couldn't er had better! The good Lawd hisse'f couldn't er hatched mo'n fifteen chick'ns outer fifteen aigs. You kin hear fer yo'se'f how lively they is, too. They's already begun to peck a lil' cawn meal dough. Po' lil' things! It do seem kinder hard fer them never ter know they own mother."

"But you are good to them and love them," said Rebecca, peeping under the old skirt and trying to count the fluffy moving balls of feathers.

"Yes, I loves 'em some, but I ain't no sho' 'nough hen an' I ain't able ter take 'em out do's an' larn 'em how ter scratch up worms. When all's told, I ain't nothin' mo'n a *incomebaker.* I furnishes animule heat same as a hen, an' I tu'ns the aigs every day same as a hen, but I stops short er cluckin' same as a *incomebaker.*"

"Maybe I could learn to cluck and take the

dear little things out doors and teach them how to scratch," suggested Rebecca, eagerly.

"Sho' you could!" delightedly. "Brer Johnson don't have no time ter give ter the chick'ns mo'n jes' ter mix up a lil' dough fer them time an' agin. The truf er the matter is, this way I has er goin' ter settin' an' hatchin' is right wearisome ter Brer Johnson. If he wa'n't a saint on yearth he'd a broke up my nes' long befo' this. He makes out it don't make no min' ter him when I gits a notion I'd like a settin' er aigs an' he goes an' fetches 'em fer me as meek as a lamb, but it kinder goes aginst his natur' ter have me so took up with a tu'nin' aigs an' sech when he's a-tryin' ter read the scripture ter me. He gits kinder recumciled when the chick'ns gits 'bout fryin' size. I ain't never been no hand ter hatch no chick'ns in late August er early September 'cause they's kinder mean months ter raise a family, but this time I got ter thinkin' how nice it would be if I could perjuce some fryin' size long 'bout Christmus."

"Oh, but Aunt Pearly Gates, you couldn't ever eat these precious little cute chicks! Why, it would be just like cannibals to do such a thing. They are pretty near your own flesh and blood."

The old negress smiled and shook her head.

"It do seem kinder hard-hearted, but I 'low chick'ns wa' put on this green yearth fer the 'spress puppose er landin' in the fryin' pan. Every chick'n what the good Gawd don't expect sooner er later ter be et as a chick'n he done foreordained ter be et as a aig. The chick'ns ain't got no choice in the matter. They better be glad if it so happens a good cook has the finish of 'em an' they don't lan' on some po' white folks' table, all soaked up in grease the way mos' of 'em has er cookin'.

"But suppose the egg is never eaten and never hatches, Aunt Pearly Gates—just gets to be rotten. What do you think the good Lord is thinkin' about when he lets that happen?"

"Well, honey chil', I wouldn't call myse'f much of a Christian if I blamed the rotten aigs on the Almighty. Rotten aigs air the plain doin's of the debble, the debble 'long with the keerlessness er folks. If the folks hadn't er been keerless the debble couldn't er got in his work, either."

"How many—er—er—families have you raised, Aunt Pearly Gates?"

"I done los' track of them long time ago," chuckled the old woman. "I reckon I done partaken of the nature of a hen in mo' ways than one. I 'low a hen fergits 'bout her las'

settin' by the time she gits started on another. I been laid up in the baid nigh onto twenty years. At the fust beginning it seemed ter me lak I couldn't stan' it. I done been a busy, active nigger all my time an' fer it ter fall ter me jes' ter spen' my time a layin' up in the baid wa' so hard I pretty nigh los' my 'ligion. I couldn't see why the good Gawd didn't sen' the 'fliction on some ooman what took it as a treat ter lay up in the baid. The idea er knittin' an' tattin' ain't come ter me at that time, but I jes' lay up an' fretted an' grumbled. I got took bad at Christmus an' come Feb'ua'y I wa' so tired er myself that I nigh went crazy. It wa' a late winter that year—col' weather commencin' on about Feb'ua'y, an' that wa' a sho' sign er late spring. I had always been a great han' at raisin' chick'ns an' I got ter worryin' over how late the hens would be a goin' ter settin' owin' ter the col' weather an then the thought comed ter me that I mought take the place of a hen. I got Si ter bring me in a settin' an' sho' 'nough I wa' jes' as good a hen as you kin fin'. That year me'n Brer Johnson had fryin' size chick'ns ter sell ter the quality long befo' anybody roun' these parts."

"How many times do you set a year, Aunt Pearly Gates?"

"It jes' depen's! Sometimes I sets about three times an' sometimes I don't git a notion mo'n every six months. One time I got greedy an' set on about thirty aigs. I 'lowed that I wa' bigger'n mos' hens an' I might do double duty, but I wa' punished fer my graspin' ways. I overlaid some of them one night in my sleep an' made sech a mess as never wa' seen an' po' Brer Johnson wa' nigh on ter goin' crazy tryin' ter git things cleaned up. 'Tain't never right to go out of nachel ways. 'Tain't nachel fer a hen ter set on mo'n fifteen or eighteen aigs, an' it ain't nachel fer a ol' bedridden ooman ter try ter outdo a hen at her own business."

Rebecca laughed merrily and the old woman looked pleased. She had been trying to make her laugh.

"The mos'es' trouble I has with this settin' business is gittin' holt er the right aigs. Co'se Si does the best he kin. He ain't no nachel chicken raiser an' he has ter give mo' of his time ter Marse Taylor's mill. Sometimes he has bad luck with his aigs an' has ter go git some off'n the neighbors. Then I fin's sometimes that I been a settin' fer three weeks on aigs that ain't got no mo' virtue in 'em than darnin' gourds. I takes mos' pleasure in Brer Johnson's pussonel aigs. He laughs at me

'bout my bein' so proudified 'bout what I sets on, but I can't help it. They's as much diffunce in aigs as they is in folks. I min' one time I got holt er some aigs from ol' Aunt Peachy's gran'son from yonder acrost the river. I mistrusted 'em from the beginnin', an' sho' 'nough you never seed sech a parlous lot as them lil' chick'ns. In the fust place only 'bout half er them hatched an' then what did come through, come through at all kin's of odd times. I was a deliverin' those lil' chick'ns for two or three days. Some er them never did grow no feathers an' some er them didn't have they full 'lowance er toes. One er them chick'ns what wa' allowed ter grow up inter a hen wa' all time crowin' jes' lak a rooster an' one er the roosters had a rubber neck jes' lak a gobbler, an' a funny fringe er feathers 'roun' the top er his haid. He sho' did 'semble ol 'Aunt Peachy. He had her grabby ways, too. When Si killed him an' tried ter bile him tender I couldn't eat a mouthful of him. I kep' on a thinkin' er Aunt Peachy an' the good Gawd knows, while I don't want ter say nothin' mean 'bout man or beast, if I had ter eat human flesh, I wouldn't be a choosin' to eat a piece of ol' Aunt Peachy."

Rebecca laughed merrily. "I fancy old Aunt

Peachy must have come out of one of the eggs the devil and carelessness had a hand in," she suggested.

Aunt Pearly Gates chuckled.

"Ain't it the truf? Now I ought'n ter be a sayin' that either. How kin we tell? Aunt Peachy done always had it in fer me'n Si; but then, she helt somethin' aginst all the folks, white an' black, on this side the ribber. I done mistrus'ed Marse Bob's jedgment some when he 'lowed you ter go make frien's with the folks at The Hedges."

"Oh, but Aunt Pearly Gates, what would I do without them? They are my best an' only friends, besides you and all the good colored people over on this side. Mr. Philip Bolling was really responsible for my getting here in good order, and he is the loveliest person I ever saw. His mother is mighty kind and pleasant, and there is something about her that kind of breaks my heart. Betsy is a peach, a nice, sound peach, without a single speck on it and never a worm on the inside, and Jo is—well, Jo is improving. He is about the only boy I ever knew, and I must say he is some fun to play around with. He looks a little like his funny, fat old father, but I am sure he will never be like him. I have taken hold of him in time."

Aunt Pearly Gates laughed at the grown-up manner of her little friend.

"Well, I *have,* and Betsy says Jo doesn't even mind washing his ears as much as he used to."

This reform amused Rebecca's fond mentor immensely. "Sho', honey, you is jes' like young Marse Tom!"

Chapter 15

A FEARSOME STORY

Rebecca had forgotten all her woes by now. Aunt Pearly Gates beamed happily on the happy little girl.

"What did you make out to think er ol' Aunt Peachy, honey?"

"Why, I can't make up my mind that she is a real person. She looks so like a queer old baboon Daddy and I used to see at the zoo. Just as I never could decide that the old baboon *was not* a person, so I can't quite believe Aunt Peachy *is one.* She mumbles the strangest things while I am there and keeps looking at me with her eyes shining like a rat's. Her eyes are not a bit like a baboon's. All monkey people have sad, soft eyes. No matter how mischievous they are, they always have a kind of mournful expression as though they had been kind of cheated in not having souls."

"You say she keeps a mumblin' things while you is aroun'?" asked Aunt Pearly Gates, a troubled expression on her kind old face.

"Yes, and one time she had a piece of putty

in her hands and she kept rolling it around and working at it kind of like the sculptors I used to know in New York do when they are modeling something."

"You mean a makin' a graben image?"

"Perhaps!"

"Well, Gawd help us, then!" Great tears rolled down the wrinkled cheeks of the old woman.

"Why, Aunt Pearly Gates, what on earth is the matter?"

"Nothin', chil', nothin' 'tall. I's jes' a ol' Afgan fool when all is tol'. I tries ter be a Christian ooman an' a true believer an' mos' the time I feels the love er the Almighty an' his blessed Son enfoldin' me. I says ober ter myse'f: 'He what dwelleth in the secret places er the Mos' High shall abide under the shadow er the Almighty.' An' then that part what somehow kinder seems lak it wa' writ 'special fer me: 'He shall cover thee with His feathers an' under His wings shalt thou trus'.' I reckon I takes on when I hears 'bout Aunt Peachy 'cause I wa' brung up ter be scairt er her. She been a weavin' her spells in this county fer mo'n a hun'erd years. My mammy befo' me wa' scairt er her an' my gran'mammy befo' her, though Aunt Peachy wa'n't mo'n a lil' black slip er a

gal 'way back in my gran'mammy's time."

"What kind of spells does she weave?' asked Rebecca, incredulously.

"Nobody don't know perzactly. She air kinder secret 'bout it an' kinder boastful. Sometimes she make out they ain't nothin' 'tall in it an' then agin she kinder give out in a sly backhanded way that she done some debblement that they ain't no undoin'. When I got took so bad twenty year ago she comed here ter my cabin an' sot up yonder an' larfed at me an' made me think she done cas' a spell over my limbs what made 'em give out on me. In my Christian heart I know'd she wa' a lyin', but in my nigger heart I couldn't help kinder b'lievin' of her.

"The doctor done said mo'n likely I'll be up an' aroun' agin, but Aunt Peachy done put her ban on that an' 'lowed I'm laid low to the end o' time. Brer Johnson 'ten' lak he ain't scairt er her, but th'ain't ary nigger in these parts what ain't kinder squeamy er Aunt Peachy."

"Are the white people afraid of her, too?"

"Some er the low-down whites is, but my folks ain't never made no min' over her. I reckon ol' Rolfe Bollin' air scairt er her. I don't reckon his wife air scairt er her 'ceptin' the way she mought be scairt er a rattlesnake. I ain't never been no han' fer a visitin' over the

ribber eben when I had the use er my limbs. I done been ter some funerals over there, an' that's about all, but I done hearn tell that Aunt Peachy air got a chist full er begalia what she casts her spells with."

"Begalia?"

"Yes, honey chil', all kin's er things lak they have in sassieties, 'cept'n' instid er badges an' ribbins an' sich she has things made out'n feathers an' bones an' ol' ha'r. They do say she air got a old dried-up han' what she waves aroun' an' if'n she ever gits close enough ter touch you with it she an' the debble air got you in they power."

"How funny!" laughed Rebecca. "I don't see how you can believe such foolishness, Aunt Pearly Gates."

"I don't neither, honey chil', but they is a feelin' way down in me that spite er prayer an' 'zortin', I air under the spell er Aunt Peachy. I ain't never let her know it an' I reckon she's a thinkin' I'm too good a Christian to bother my haid about her.

"I 'member when I wa' a gal 'bout fifteen, one hot night 'bout the middle er summer when the wheat crap wa' in an' the late taters planted an' the 'backer wa'n't big enough ter s'po't no worms an' wuck done slack up a bit on the

slaves on both sides er the ribber, an' somehow a res'less feelin' done got a holt er folks, what with the heat an' a big moon that didn't let you git no res' at night 'cause it wa' mos' as bright as the sun an' pretty nigh as hot.

"That's wa' in ol' Marse Thomas' time, the paw er Marse Bob. Now Marse Thomas wa' as good a marster as they wa' in Virginny, but he wa' moughty 'ticular 'bout one thing; he didn' let his niggers holt no meetin's without'n they wa' helt in the chu'ch what wa' built fer the pu'pose, an' he didn' 'low none er us ter go traipsin' over the ribber, 'cept'n' it wa' on business er his'n.

"In harvest time in them days the Bollings an' Taylors useter help one another out by lendin' hands back an' fo'th, but it ain't never been much satisfaction in it. Looks lak they wa' allus some kinder row 'bout somethin' arfter harvest, even in them days when the families wa' kinder frien'ly. The niggers didn't mix very well, owin' ter ol' Aunt Peachy an' her outlandish ways. She wa' a turrible lookin' pusson, even then, an' she done got holt er blacks an' whites over ter The Hedges an' ben' 'em all ter her ways. Rolfe Bolling's paw wa' one er these will-an'-they-won't pussons what had about as much git-up-an'-git about him as a ol' pump

what air los' its sucker an' Aunt Peachy didn't make no mo' min' ter him than she would er ter a flea."

The old woman paused a moment to pick up a stitch in her knitting.

"There, now, I done drap a stitch! That's 'cause I air doin' wrong a-talkin' 'bout ol' Aunt Peachy an' her Mumbo Jumbo a carryin' on."

"But, Aunt Pearly Gates, please don't stop. It was a dark night—no, I forgot, the moon was shining so bright it was almost as hot as the sun. Usually when people tell about something scary it's a dark night. Please tell me! What happened on that hot night?"

"My mammy wa' a youngish ooman then an' I wa' a gal o' fifteen. My pappy wa' a pow'ful rovin' man, mo'n half Injun. There wa'n't nothin' goin' on in the woods my pappy didn't know about. He wa' all time gittin' up in the night an' cropin' out'n the cabin. Mammy wa' moughty jealous er pappy, though I don' think she had no reason ter be. In the fus' place Marse Thomas didn' stan' fer no carryin's on in the quarters an' if'n they wa' any a goin' on they wa' allus some tell-tale-tit ter be infawmin' 'bout it. I jes' think the Injun useter be too strong in him sometimes an' he'd be fo'ced ter answer the call."

"Was that the way it was on that hot moonlight night?" asked Rebecca, who was afraid Aunt Pearly Gates might switch off from her story into a dissertation concerning heredity.

"P'raps! Anyhow, I woke up from a doze an' pappy wa' gone an' mammy wa' a standin' up in the middle er the flo' in her yaller cotton shift an' I could see her plain as day, the moon wa' that bright. She didn't look lak mammy, somehow, 'cause her eyes wa' a rollin' lak a res'less young filly's. She wa' a listenin' ter somethin' an' I never said nothin', but listened, too. Away off yonder you could hear a kinder hollow boom! boom!"

"Like soldiers marching?"

"No! Not like soldiers—not lak anything I ever done hearn befo' er sence. There wa' the boom an' a kinder hum a' keepin' up with it, jes' lak bumbly bees. Mammy kinder snorted an' 'thout payin' no 'tention ter her chilluns she jes' bulged out'n the do' an' made fer the woods. I jumps up an' starts arfter her. I ain't got no notion wha' she a goin', but I 'lowed I wa'n't a gonter stay in that cabin wif nothin' but sleepin' chilluns an' the air all full er that gashly boomin'.

"Outside you could hear the boomin' plainer an' the hummin' got louder an' louder. In them days the woods wa' thick 'roun' here. Great

big oaks an' chestnuts wa' crowded clost an' no room for these here scrubby fiel' pines what air a takin' the country nowadays. The trees grew clost ter the river's aidge an' spread up over the hills plum ter the mountings. That there hub fact'ry ain't got in so much er its wuck a destroyin' of forests in those days, though it wa' a goin' even then—"

"And on that hot moonlight night—" suggested Rebecca.

"I ain't fergittin'. On that hot night when mammy done flew the coop in her yaller shift I started right arfter her—she a cropin' through the woods an' me a slidin' not so fur behind. At the fust beginning I wa' a thinkin' mammy wa' out a huntin' pappy, lak she done sometimes, but it come ter me that she wa'n't a huntin' him nor no man, but wa' a makin' fer the boom-a-laddy-boom what got louder an' closeter. She made straight fer the river, where a great big oak tree had done felled acrost the water, makin' what we calls a coon bridge. On beyant this tree wa' a clearin' with only a few stragglin' trees. One er them trees wa' hollow, owin' ter some hunters havin' started a fire down at the bottom mos' lakly trying ter smoke out a coon or p'raps a possum. It stood in the clearin' dead and ga'nt an' black. Aunt Peachy

an' some er her men folks had done tacked a ol' horse hide over that there hollow in the tree an' when I crope up behind mammy I seen what wa' a makin' the boom. There wa' a great big black man, what belonged ter the Macons, who lived over pretty nigh ter the mountings, a beatin' on that ol' horse hide, same as a drum. They wa' a crowd er black folks from plantations all aroun' hereabouts, 'bout fifty I reckon all tol', an' others wa' comin' a cropin' through the underbrush same as mammy an' me.

"Mos' the women wa' in they yaller cotton shifts same as mammy an' the men had on they shirts, some er em', an' some jes' ol' pants what they had pulled on. Aunt Peachy wa' standin' on a big rock. You kin see that rock ter this day in the midst er that parsture down on the other side the ribber. If you could er seed her that night you could git some idea how come I's got a kinder awesome feelin' fer that ol' nigger. In them days she wa' big. You couldn't never believe it when you sees her now all dried up an' pretty nigh ready ter blow away, but Aunt Peachy wa' a hefty ooman an' as straight as a pine tree. I ain't never in all these years been able ter git her image out'n my min'.

"If there is sech a thing as a she-debble Aunt Peachy am her. She had done unwropped her

plaits an' her ha'r wa' a standing out from her haid lak a bush an' she didn't have on a rag er clothes savin' beads an' she had string on string er them, made out'n all kinds er things. Some er them wa' made out er buttons an' bones, ol' teeth an' the lak. She had on shiny bracelets on her arms an' laigs made out'n brass an' tin. She wa' that outlandish looking she'd a skeert the Angel Gabrul. She skeert me an' still I couldn't run, but I crope closeter an' closeter until I wa' right against her. She had a evil eye an' she rolled it aroun' on me an' pierced me through an' through until I jes' fell on my knees all of a trimble."

"But what was she doing, Aunt Pearly Gates? What was all the booming an' humming for? Why was she fixed up so funny?"

"I wa'n't sho', honey baby, but I done hearn whisperin's goin' 'roun' that Aunt Peachy had some kinder cha'm-wuckin' power that she done got straight from the debble hisse'f. They do say she had it an' her pappy befo' her had it an' mebbe her gran'pappy — an' some er them beads an' things wa' handed down ter her from Afgan kings, beads an' cha'm-wuckin' bones an' sich. Anyhow, she done got all the niggers fer miles aroun' skeert er her spells an' cha'ms an' she got 'em a thinkin' that she wa' a kinder

she-god-debble what wa' mo' holy than the Lamb an' when they hearn the drum a rollin' they mus' come a runnin'.

"Now Ol' Miss, what wa' Marse Thomas' wife an' yo' great-gran'maw—Miss Viginia Harrison as wa'—wa' a great han' ter learn the slaves Bible teachin's. She done tuck lots er pains with me 'long with a whole passel er young nigger gals, but it looked lak she kinder singled me out 'cause she 'lowed she wa' gonter make a lady's maid er me. At the same time Marse Thomas wa' a carryin' on Sabbath school fer the men folks. Si Johnson, that is Brer Johnson, wa' his prize scholard an' owin' ter his a holpin' his pappy in the mill he useter have time ter put his book larnin' he done picked up ter some 'count an' while the mill wheel wa' a-doin' the wuck Si could set an' search the scriptures.

"When I fell on my knees thar in front er that wicked ooman I thought the debble had me fer sho'. The big black man, what wa' owned by the Macons, wa' a beatin' on the ol' horse hide an' the boom-a-laddy-boom wa' a keepin' time ter my heartbeats. Aunt Peachy done ketch on ter how skeert I wa' an' she wa' jes' that low-lifed ter wuck some er her debble cha'ms on me. She start a marchin' roun' me a singin' some

kinder outlandish chune 'thout no words. The chune had a kinder swing ter it lak one er our chu'ch chunes, but it wa' diffunt, too. It sounded mo' wil' lak, an' befo' you know'd what wa' happenin' all the crowd er folks began marchin' behin' Aunt Peachy jes lak so many sheep an' they tuck up the chune same as her. Even my own mammy jined the others, but I ain't never helt it aginst her none 'case I wa' sho' she didn't know what she wa' a doin'. All wa' a circlin' roun' me 'cept'n' one young man. It wa' Si Johnson an' what should he do but come an' kneel down by me an' we foun' ourselves a sayin' what Ol' Miss an' Ol' Marse Thomas done been a learnin' us ter say out'n the lil' Bible book what they calls Pra'r Book: 'O Lamb er Gawd who taketh away the sins er the worl', have mercy upon us!' We said it over an' over until a kinder peace stol' over us in spite er the turrible dance what wa' a goin' on.

"I looked up to the sky kinder lak I 'spected a sign er somethin' from Jesus. The moon wa' a hangin' low by that time an' the shadows wa' gittin' long. The big hollow tree what wa' servin' as a drum stood out black an' scrawny aginst the sky. All of a sudden I seen the sign an' I know'd somehow it wa' meant fer me, an' the Lamb er Gawd wa' a havin' mercy upon me.

I jumped up from my knees an' I called out in a loud, clear voice, an' in them days they useter say I had a voice lak a bell—even though I wa' so young they useter call on me ter lead the singin' at meetin's."

"What was the sign? What did you call?" asked Rebecca, her eyes shining with excitement.

"I called out: 'See the cross! Sinners! See the cross!' Sho' 'nough, thar wa' the cross right thar befo' us—an' it wa' the self-same ol' burnt tree with the horse hide stretched 'roun' it with the black man a beatin' it fer dear life.

"'Look! Look! We're in the shadder er the cross!' I cried out louder an' clearer, an' all the crazy dancers stopped an' looked down on the groun' an' seed the shadder an' then they looked up an' seed the ol' burnt tree a standin' out lak a cross an' they fell down on they knees an' howled lak they wa' in mortal pain. Si Johnson then began ter 'zort an' pray an' the black man what had been a beatin' er the drum fell down in a kinder fit.

"The outlandish chune what they had been a hummin' an' buzzin' wa' still a ringin' in my years, an' all of a sudden it come ter me that it wa' pretty nigh the chune what we all time sung, 'Come Along, True Believer' to, so I jes' raised up my voice in the hymn an' it wa'n't

much trouble ter make the change an' pull the debble chune 'roun' ter the hymn chune."

"Oh, please sing it to me, Aunt Pearly Gates!"

"I ain't got much voice left, honey chil', but this is the way it went:

"'Come along, true believer, come along:
The time am a rollin' 'roun,'
When them what stan's a-haltin' by the way
Won't wear no glory crown!
Oh, the moon shine white, the moon shine bright;
Hear the news what the spirut tells,
The angels say there's nothin' fer ter do
But ter ring them cha'min' bells!

"'Almos' home! Almos' home!
We faints an' falls by spells:
Angels say th'ain't nothin' fer to do
But ter ring them cha'min' bells!'"

The sweet old voice rose and fell in the lovely negro melody. Rebecca's eyes filled with tears as she listened, enraptured.

"And then what?" she asked, breathless.

"Then all jined in an' we po' colored folks stood thar in the moonlight an' worshipped Gawd lak white folks done taught us ter worship, with the shadow of the cross fallin' on us."

"Oh, Aunt Pearly Gates, how wonderful!

And what became of Aunt Peachy after that?"

"She done slunk away an' nobody did'n' hearn no mo' er her conjering fer many a day. The nex' thing we know'd, Aunt Peachy wa' one er the mos' rombustious mimbers er the chu'ch, prayin' an' 'zortin' an' shoutin'. She allus had it in fer me'n Si, though, fer bus'in' up her conjer dance. Three or fo' years arfter that, when me'n Si done got Marse Thomas' consent ter git married, Aunt Peachy done tu'n up at the wedding, though Gawd knows she didn't git no invite, an' she brung along a bride's gif', a moughty fine-looking glass water pitcher with a crack in it. I's fear'd Aunt Peachy's 'ligion an' her pitcher air jes' about the same: neither one er them won't hol' water."

Chapter 16

MAJOR TAYLOR IN DOUBT

Aunt Pearly Gates was right. Spring had come to the heart of Spottswood Taylor. Rebecca rejoiced in the sunshine of his smile. He did not always answer her when she spoke to him, but at least he looked at her, and that not unkindly, and sometimes he smiled. More and more, he took her part against the aunts. Ever since he had come to her defense with what Rebecca designated as "that precious hell," she had been sure of a champion when those conscientious ladies felt in duty bound to correct her faults. They began to be careful not to admonish her in their brother's presence, unless they were quite sure of the justice of their point.

One restriction, to which they clung with pertinacity, was that Rebecca should not cross the river alone. They considered their side of the river safe for the child, but it was a well-known fact that the Bolling darkeys were a disreputable lot and they hinted vaguely at terrible things that might happen if she continued to cross the river alone to call on her friends. Then

it was that Spot came manfully to her assistance when his father, for once, sided with his daughters.

"She can have Doctor to look after her. No darkey living would dare to come near her if Doctor has her in charge," said Doctor's master.

Major Taylor looked at his son quizzically, but refrained from bantering. He understood what it meant to Spot to offer his dog for the child's protection. Major Taylor well knew that his son, as well as his daughters, doubted Rebecca's claim to kinship. Certainly there was little in her favor. The fact that she had known about Aunt Pearly Gates, and her habit of hatching chickens in her bed, could hardly stand in a court of law as proof that she was Tom Taylor's daughter. Now that her hair was clipped close, Major Taylor fancied he could detect some resemblance to his dead son in the shape of her head and the way her ears were set, but he had to confess to himself that he was so eagerly looking for a likeness that it was easy to fool himself into finding one.

He was constantly seeing in Rebecca traits of character that reminded him of Tom, the same gallant fearlessness, the same philosophical way of accepting disappointment, the same faculty of seeing something amusing in the sim-

plest things of life. She was certainly much more like his boy Tom in disposition than was his own brother, Spot. It was like Tom, however, to be so generous in offering his dog to protect a child. That was not much like Spot—not the Spot his father knew, at least. Could he have been mistaken in Spot? Anyhow, he was grateful to him for befriending his little Rebecca.

Whether she were his grandchild or not, the old man loved her fiercely. Usually he was sure she was of his own flesh and blood, but there were times of agonizing doubt. This he would hardly confess to himself, and he would have died rather than let his family know it. He had made a new will so worded that there would be no doubt about the child's inheriting what he intended her to have, whether she belonged to him or not. He was confident that she herself believed Tom Taylor was her father.

A few days after Rebecca's coming to Mill House, Robert Taylor had written to Mrs. O'Shea, but weeks had gone by with no answer from her. He had asked in language most courteous that she oblige him with any and all proofs of the identity of the little girl she had so kindly sent him, also that she should immediately forward to him the trunk of letters that had

belonged to his son, any drawings or canvases executed by his son and the books left by Rebecca's stepfather, which he presumed would belong to the child if no other heir claimed them.

After three months his letters to Mrs. O'Shea had been returned to him, stamped "Not found." He was deeply thankful to Providence that he had been on hand to receive the mail the morning the letters were returned to him. While he scorned his daughters' intelligence and judgment, he dreaded their knowing that his inquiries concerning Rebecca had proved futile.

There was nothing to do now but put the matter in the hands of a detective agency. He would have gone to New York himself but for the fact that his hub factory was giving him a great deal of trouble. His manager had left and the labor question was annoying. He wished Spot might be relied upon to go to New York and attend to the matter for him, but he dreaded talking to his son about Rebecca. If the detective agency had nothing favorable to report, the old man had determined to keep it secret.

He awaited with deep anxiety the report from the New York agency. He lived in constant dread that Rebecca might learn that he had consulted detectives concerning the inhabitants of the studio on West Tenth Street. It seemed

like disloyalty on his part to doubt for a moment that she was his own grandchild. She had accepted him on faith and he knew she thought he had done the same by her.

Rebecca also had written Mrs. O'Shea. Her letter was returned with those of her grandfather. He had decided that he would not let her know about it, not yet at least. It might cause his darling some sorrow to find that the woman who had played such an active part in her life and her destiny had vanished into thin air.

Finally the detective agency reported that two days after Rebecca left New York, Mrs. O'Shea had gone as stewardess on a vessel sailing for Calcutta. She had decided quite suddenly to accept the position, and had left sketchy orders concerning mail to be forwarded. The report added that it was difficult to ascertain much concerning the former inhabitants of the studio in West Tenth Street. The property had changed hands several times in the last fifteen years and the leases to the various tenants and the names of those tenants had not been traced. It was now owned by a man who lived in the house facing the street, where Mrs. O'Shea had been employed as janitress. This owner knew little of the journalist who had recently died in the

studio. He had paid his rent irregularly, but always had paid it. He had seemed a quiet, refined person, a good tenant, in fact. There had been a child or stepchild—the owner of the property was not sure of the relationship. Mrs. O'Shea had cleaned the studio for them. That was about all he could tell about the dead man.

Several days after the funeral—the very day Mrs. O'Shea had quit her place as janitress to accept the job of stewardess on the ship sailing for Calcutta—a young woman had come to the studio demanding her property. Mrs. O'Shea had identified her as the wife of the journalist, although she had not lived with him for several years. The rent having been paid in advance before the tenant had died there was no reason for holding the studio furnishings, and they had been carted off by the pretty young woman. There was little of value left in the apartment, as the long illness of the tenant had necessitated the disposal of much of the furnishings. The owner had noted that there were a good many old books, some pictures and trunks and shabby divans. Where the van had carried the things he could not say. He remembered there had been a slight altercation between Mrs. O'Shea and the young woman concerning a missing bon-

net which had been left in a closet of the studio. He gathered the bonnet was of crepe, the kind often worn by widows.

That was all. The neighbors who might possibly have known the journalist were not to be found. Some people named Mygatt had gone to Paris. If there were friends, which no doubt there were, the detectives had not been able to trace them.

"Stupid fools!" exclaimed Robert Taylor. "There must be some way to find out more about my child. Why don't they look up birth certificates?" Then he remembered Rebecca told him she had been born on shipboard and perhaps the birth had not been reported. He was ignorant of the regulations in such matters. He wondered what had been the name of the vessel. Did Rebecca know?

He asked her one day quite casually, having led the conversation to ships, but she did not know. Another time he asked her if she had any idea as to what had become of the dancing lady whom she had called Mamma—where she was and what her stage name might be, if she had one, but Rebecca had no idea.

"She used to call herself Nell Morgan before she married Papa but she dropped that name, which wasn't her real name, and called herself

Madame Ernst Sorel," said Rebecca. "After she married Daddy of course she went by his name and when she left us I don't know what she called herself. She might have made a big name for herself if she hadn't have been so busy getting married. At least, that is what I heard one of the men say at the studio. He was talking to a painty girl and didn't know I heard him. I'm kind of sorry for poor Mamma. She had too much temperament for her sense."

The Misses Taylor had gathered from various sources that their father was in communication with persons in New York and were sure that, had he proof of Rebecca's parentage, he would have divulged it. Spot was uncertain what to think about the child, but he had begun to like her so much it made little difference to him whether she had Taylor blood in her veins or not.

Spot's feeling about Taylor blood was not so intense as his sisters'. In fact he rather preferred any other blood. Certainly his own family had never done anything to endear themselves to the young man. His sisters seemed to feel that he was merely someone who might fetch and carry for them, see to it that they had plenty of early vegetables and that the cows

were kept up to the mark for milk and butter and that the hogs were properly fattened to the important end of being turned into good bacon. He respected and admired his father, but was always awkward and uneasy in his presence, feeling confident that the old man was finding something about him to cause extreme amusement.

The relations who occasionally visited at Mill House as a rule took very little notice of Spottswood. Some of them even made him feel that they regarded him as the man-of-all-work on the farm, whose business it was to see that their trunks got hauled over from the Court House. The one Taylor he had always loved and felt easy with had been his brother Tom. Tom had been an ideal big brother, kindly and friendly, never twitting him with being slow-witted. Spottswood was only a little boy when his brother went off to be an artist but he remembered with clearness his grief at his leaving home and then, when he was seventeen and the news came of Tom's death in New York, his poignant though silent suffering had left a mark on the shy, sullen boy.

He would have been glad to be certain that the little girl was his niece, but whether she was his brother's child or not she was a clever little

kid, with plenty of spunk and a good sport to boot.

And so Rebecca's kinship rested—undetermined. Spottswood was passively friendly and his sisters were coldly hostile to the dark-haired little girl. And Major Taylor pondered and waited.

Chapter 17

BETSY'S MORTIFICATION

"How you gonter git—get to school every morning?" Jo asked Rebecca.

"I don't know. They haven't decided yet. The aunts always do a lot of talking back and forth before they come to any conclusion and Grandfather is so busy with extra work at the hub factory that he hasn't thought about it yet."

"Well, Betsy and me—and I—think it would be prime if you meet us at the mill every morning and drive over with us. I thought about it first. Betsy *says* she did but forgot to mention it. That's the way girls do when anybody gits—gets ahead of 'em. Not all girls! I think you play right fair."

"Thank you, Jo! I'm glad they put off opening school a week because it gives my hair a chance to grow a little. I'm frightened, anyhow, about starting to school. You see I never have gone before. I guess I'm going to have a hard time in arithmetic."

"Oh, shoo! I'll learn you that. 'Tain't hard."

"Well I'll *teach* you English while you *learn* me arithmetic."

The aunts promptly objected to Rebecca's accepting Jo's offer to drive her to and from school, as they did not wish to be put under obligations to neighbors they considered as objectionable as the Bollings, but they could not but concede that it simplified matters and finally gave a grudging consent to the arrangement.

Rebecca was to meet the Bollings at the mill every morning and they were to drop her there on the way home. Spottswood offered to see that Rebecca got to the bridge on time.

When school opened Spot's own dapper mare was ordered to be hitched to his red-wheeled buggy and immediately after breakfast on school mornings uncle and niece would spin over the red clay road, arriving at the trysting place in time to see the Bollings come jogging along the lane.

Betsy and Jo drove a horse known as the grey colt, hitched to a disreputable-looking old phaeton whose better days had been so long ago that brother and sister could not recall them. The grey colt might have become grey with old age, had he not been born that way. But the young Bollings made no complaint of their turnout, being thankful that they had some means of

locomotion other than their own limbs. Philip had been forced to walk to the Court House to school in all weathers.

As for Rebecca, she adored both colt and phaeton. "They remind me so of the movies," she said.

Spottswood seemed to have much business at the village of late and often he would suggest that Betsy should get in his buggy and Jo and Rebecca drive the colt. This arrangement suited all parties. Rebecca was supposed to walk home from the mill in the afternoon but she often found her uncle waiting for her when the grey colt made his leisurely way down the road.

The eternal feminine in Rebecca soon sensed the budding romance. She thrilled with it and did all in her power to further it, managing to lead the conversation to Betsy when she was in her uncle's presence and to Spot when she was with Betsy. Sometimes she could not help teasing a little but she did it with delicate adroitness.

"I'm getting kind of uneasy about Uncle Spot," Rebecca confided to her friend, "driving me over every morning and meeting me so often in the afternoon. He's so anxious to spare the grey colt, too, by taking part of his load when he goes over to the Court House."

Betsy blushed and whipped up the grey colt.

Occasionally Betsy came to Mill House to see her little friend and Spot always managed to have business at the house on those occasions. Sometimes he even suggested to Rebecca that he should drive her over to the Bollings. More and more did he realize that Betsy was the girl for him, although he knew she was far removed from his family ideal. There was nothing of the aristocrat about Betsy, but what did he, Spottswood Taylor, want with an aristocratic wife? He had heard too much talk of such things from his sisters and their friends, chosen because of their blue blood. He wished he knew how his father felt about it. Tom, who every one knew was his father's favorite, had married where he had loved, regardless of family tradition, and his father had promptly disinherited him. How could he, Spottswood, hope for greater leniency from his father, in case his choice of a wife displeased the old gentleman?

The whole county knew to what depths of degradation Rolfe Bolling had sunk. The fact that in his veins was as good Cavalier blood as flowed in Virginia made him the more contemptible in the eyes of his neighbors. There was no denying, however, that Rolfe Bolling's children would have done credit to the worthiest of sires. In the few months that Philip had been home

the neighbors had recognized his worth and character. As for Betsy, she was a universal favorite with her gay laughing nature and her ready good-humor.

Spottswood was always hearing her praises sung at the Court House by old and young. It was spoken of as a crying shame that such a girl should not be able to have guests in her own home, but not even Betsy's insouciance could withstand the mortification of having her friends see her father and Mam' Peachy and the unfortunate conditions in her home. It was the one cloud in the sunshine of Betsy's clear sky. Sometimes it seemed very black to the girl but her nature was so sunny, her outlook so gay, that she would quickly dispel the feeling. It was absurd in that big house not to have a parlor where she might receive her friends, but her father used one front room for his bed room and the other was the family sitting room where he sprawled all day and where he saw the persons who came to The Hedges on business. There were two small rooms downstairs in the main part of the house besides the dining room but one of them was Elizabeth's sewing room and the other one was full to overflowing with Rolfe's plunder, watermelon seeds drying on newspapers, old guns and fishing rods, discarded har-

ness and saddles, empty bottles and jugs—a miscellaneous collection of odds and ends that nothing but a fire could ever dispose of. The master of The Hedges never gave away anything and never threw away anything and the consequence was his home was overflowing with useless and worn-out articles that were the despair of his orderly wife.

If she had had her way, Betsy would have taken matters in her own hands and cleared out the rubbish that littered the one room that she might have turned into a place where she could see her friends, but Elizabeth remembered too well the moment in her early married life when she had attempted to bring some order out of the chaos of this lumber room of her husband's and his fury and Mam' Peachy's remarks about the curiosity and interfering ways of the poor whites.

Rebecca Taylor was almost the only visitor who came to The Hedges. Sometimes she spent Saturday with Betsy and Jo, and Uncle Spot would drive over for her in the evening. On these occasions he would hitch his horse and sit on the front porch, talking shyly to Betsy. Sometimes the girl would ask him into the house, but something always happened to embarrass her when he complied. Either Mam' Peachy would

come slipping into the sitting room, smelling vilely of whisky and cackling shrilly about Mill folks and their perfidious ways of loving beneath them and marrying above, or Rolfe Bolling would appear in his stocking feet, the shirt that had been put on clean in the morning as filthy as though he had worn it a week.

Elizabeth would receive the young man kindly though stiffly. She saw so few persons outside of her family that her manner was apt to be distant and constrained. Philip was always cordial and pleasant. He talked farming and crops with Spot with a seeming disregard of the embarrassing interruptions caused either by the outrageous old negress or his father.

Betsy usually could laugh at Mam' Peachy and overlook her father's ill manners and slovenly habits but when Spottswood Taylor was present she took their idiosyncracies very seriously, her bright eyes would fill with tears of mortification and her usually laughing mouth tremble with hurt sensibilities.

"I can't and won't stand it!" she cried out one evening after Spottswood Taylor had driven over for Rebecca and had come into the house for a few minutes. She had asked him in knowing that her father and Mam' Peachy were safe in the kitchen with the doors closed. She knew

that Old Abe had but recently arrived from his periodic trip to the mountains with a full jug, which never failed to occupy the master and a favored few for some hours. Feeling they were safely occupied and would not appear in the front of the house to disgrace her, Betsy had been quite cordial to the handsome neighbor in her invitation to enter the house.

"Come in," she had smiled. "Rebecca and Philip have gone up to the attic to find a book. They will be down in a moment."

Betsy could not but be flattered by Spottswood Taylor's evident admiration for her. She had known of it for a long time—ever since she was quite a little girl in fact. For several years she had been conscious of the fact that, in the little country church where the Taylors and Bollings worshiped, Spot paid more attention to her profile than he did to the sermon. How a girl knows her profile is being studied is an enigma not to be solved, but know it she always does. Spottswood Taylor's sisters had never seemed to be conscious of her having a profile, even of her having a face—that is not until she had gone to Mill House to see Rebecca and then the Misses Taylor had been coldly and formally polite.

Betsy was a girl with few complexities in her

nature. She was not sensitive like her mother and Philip and her father's habits and appearance formerly did not seem to mortify her as they had the others. She had carelessly explained matters at The Hedges to Rebecca when she first began to go there by saying:

"Don't mind Mam' Peachy and Father! They are both kind of nutty!"

But now that Spottswood Taylor had begun to come to her home the girl had become very sensitive about the conditions there. When she broke out with "I can't and won't stand it!" more than usual had occurred to mortify her. Not only had her father come into the sitting room in his stocking feet smelling vilely of the mountain whisky but Mam' Peachy and her son, Old Abe, had followed him, both of them drunk, laughing loudly and coarsely.

Mam' Peachy had leered impertinently into the face of the caller and said: "Yi! Yi! Mill House folk a callin' on they betters! I mind the time when yo' great gran'pap thought hisse'f uplif'ed when we-alls 'lowed him ter grin' us's cawn. He wa' the one what got in he haid ter start the hub fact'ry an' come here tryin' ter buy lan' on our side er the ribber. We wouldn't sell ter him! Naw! Not us-all! We done tol' him we'd rent a lil' strip ter him, jes fer 'commerda-

tion. We-alls wa'n't a gonter sell off none er us's lan' but we'd rent some fer say a hunerd years fer a sum down, same as buyin'."

"Hush! You ol' fool nigger!" admonished her master. "You go on back ter the kitchen. You ain't got no sense on 'count er that cawn liquor you done been a drinkin'."

"What did she mean?" asked Spottswood, puzzled. "Wasn't the land bought from your family by my great-grandfather? I always understood it was."

"She ain't a meanin' nothin'," said Rolfe Bolling, with the insinuating manner of a person who has drunk too much but has just enough sense to try to conceal something. "You mus' 'scuse Mam' Peachy."

"Yes, you mus' scuse Mam' Peachy," said Old Abe solemnly. "She wan't a meanin' ter let no cat out'n the bag."

"Ain't no cat in no bag," said the old woman vindictively. "Ain't nothin' but a piece er paper in Ol' Marse's desk what had writ on it jes' what I 'members. I ain't nebber fergit nothin' in my life. I's drunk now but I still kin 'member an' I tell you one thing, young man, you young Taylor man, with yo' toploftical ways, you an' yo' stiff-backed sisters an' that mean ol' dried up Bob Taylor what thinks hisse'f too good ter

'sociate wif my baby here, I jes' tell you ter look out! I done made a spell on all er you Mill folks, on you white folks an' on all the black folks, an' the spell air a wuckin' an' it air wuckin' quick. I done got some er that there lil' brat's har what yo' stiff-backed sisters cut off'n her haid an' I got her tintype an' I done made a cha'm spell what air gonter bring sorrow an' de-struction on all er you-all, root an' branch. I done kep' that ol' fool Pearly Gates in the baid fer nigh on ter twenty years an' I ain't even begun yit on what I air a goin' ter do ter the whole bilin' er Taylors."

By this time Mam' Peachy was screaming in high shrill tones and had begun to jump up and down in a kind of frenzy. Philip and Rebecca heard, even up in the attic, and Philip came hurriedly down, Rebecca following more slowly.

"What is all this?" he demanded sternly. "Old Abe, take your mother to her room."

"An' who are you ter be a givin' orders in my house?" demanded Rolfe Bolling with drunken bluster.

"I am your son," said Philip sadly. "I will take you to your room, Father." He caught hold of his father's arm and led him off.

Rolfe Bolling did not resist but meekly allowed himself to be taken to his room and put to bed,

weeping in maudlin fashion. "Mam' Peachy hadn't ought ter a tol' that 'bout jes' rent'n the lan' ter the Taylors. I wa' allowin' ter git lots er spo't out'n that there lease," he whimpered.

This unpleasant incident cut short the visit and, very soon, Spottswood and Rebecca bade their friends good-bye and departed for Mill House.

Chapter 18

THE MISSING DEED BOOK

"Uncle Spot, don't you think we ought to tell Grandfather what that terrible old woman said?" Rebecca asked as she drove home with her uncle.

"I think we should, although I am sure there is nothing in it. She was so drunk she didn't know what she was talking about."

"That's just it—she let it out. Couldn't you see that Mr. Bolling tried to stop her and Old Abe? Isn't she the most horrible old person you ever saw? I can't get over my giving her a lock of my hair. You see, Uncle Spot, when Aunt Myra and Aunt Evelyn cut off my hair I felt terrible bad because there wasn't a soul who wanted a lock of it. I am all the time reading about how people treasure the hair of those they love—how mothers treasure the locks of hair cut from the heads of their angel children—and it made me lonesome to think that I had all that great wad of long hair and nobody on earth cared what became of it. The first time I went to the Bollings' after my hair was shingled, old

Aunt Peachy was real nice to me. She asked me what I had done with all my pretty hair and when she begged me for a lock of it I was right complimented. I never did like her at all but I thought it was real sweet of her to care about having some of my hair. I took over the whole plait that Aunt Pearly Gates had run through the hole in the top of my bonnet. I guess she's got enough to make hoodoo spells on the whole family."

Rebecca laughed a little uneasily.

"You surely don't believe any of that nonsense," Spot said severely.

"No-o, not exactly—"

"If you are afraid of her, you ought not to go to The Hedges," suggested Spottswood.

"I'm not truly afraid—just kind of squeamish. I like to shiver a little all up and down my backbone. That's the way Aunt Peachy makes me feel. I know she can't do anything to me just because she has my plait, but it's kind of fun to half way believe she might, although I know in my sane mind that she couldn't."

When Spottswood and Rebecca told Major Taylor of the remark the old negress had made concerning the hub factory he only laughed.

"Ridiculous!" he snorted. "It was taken on a hundred-year lease at first by my grandfather,

but before I was born my father persuaded old Bolling, that was Rolfe's father, to sell it outright. He was a man who could be persuaded into anything. My father wanted more land than was mentioned in the lease and while he was buying it he easily bought the other. It wasn't supposed to be valuable land, but my father paid a good price for it. Old Peachy can't beat me remembering. I can remember what happened before I was born."

"I suppose you have the deed, or something with which to combat their evidence?" asked Spot.

"It must have been duly recorded, of course —but, by Jove, when the Yankees tried to burn the court house some of those deed books disappeared! If that particular one was among them then old Rolfe will give me some trouble. I am sure there is nothing among my father's papers in the way of proof."

Major Taylor looked worried.

"They never have been able to trace the deed books that were lost. It would hardly be likely that the Yankees would want to steal such useless treasures as old deed books. There were three of them I believe."

Investigation disclosed that the deed book in which the transaction between the owners of The

Hedges and Mill House had been recorded was one of the three missing books. There was no evidence extant of the transaction. The fact that Major Taylor's father had told him of it would hardly stand in a court of law. Rolfe Bolling's old lease, found in his grandfather's desk, would certainly be more convincing than any traditional evidence Major Taylor might swear to.

That was the way the owner of Mill House began to look at the matter. He regretted exceedingly the recent improvements he had introduced into his factory. Wagon hubs being not so much in demand as formerly, owing to the increasing use of automobiles, he had determined to begin the manufacture of certain automobile parts and reduce the output of hubs. This had entailed a large outlay of funds. He had been sure the venture was a wise one, but if there were any danger of the lease on his land being terminated and the supposed owner not being willing to renew it, a grave loss might ensue.

At no time in his life had Robert Taylor so much wanted to make money. This wish was because of his little Rebecca. He felt that he would die happy if he could leave her an independent fortune. He had enough to provide amply for his daughters and son, but he wanted

more money so that he would not have to take from the others to leave to her. Now if Rolfe Bolling had the law on his side and was able to do this mean, underhand thing, there would be little to leave to anyone.

Major Taylor was not a person to await developments. As soon as he knew that the deed book, in which the purchase of the land must have been recorded, was missing, he determined to go and see Rolfe Bolling, after consulting a lawyer, whose opinion was that Bolling might have a good case, but the chances were fifty-fifty that the court of equity would decree otherwise.

Major Taylor regretted that he had been so unneighborly in his attitude towards Rolfe Bolling, now that he must have dealings with him. He could hardly think that the man meant to ruin him. All he had to go on was the drunken ravings of a vindictive old negress, no doubt in her second childhood, since her age was many years over a hundred. Spottswood and Rebecca had taken her remarks seriously, but the chances were they meant nothing. He hoped Philip Bolling had some influence over his father if he could be contemplating an attempt to oust the owner of the hub factory. He liked Philip and he was to be ever in his debt for the

service the young man had rendered in bringing little Rebecca safe to Mill House.

It had been years since Robert Taylor had made a business call at The Hedges. Of course he had been told of the ravages time and carelessness and vandalism had made on the farm, once the show place of the county, and was prepared to find things in worse condition than they were. Already Philip's industry had righted sagging gates and fence posts. No longer were farming implements to be found rusting in the fields. Outhouses that had outlived their usefulness had been torn down and those that were left had been patched, propped up and whitewashed.

The negro quarters had undergone the greatest change. Philip had inaugurated a general cleaning up of their premises, which had been a disgrace to the neighborhood. This was the first improvement noted by Major Taylor as he left the main road and turned up the lane leading to the Bolling farm. The negro settlement known as The Quarters was on this lane and must be passed to reach The Hedges. This spot had been considered the most disreputable in the county. Few deviltries were committed that were not thought to have their origin at The Quarters. Rolfe Bolling owned the cabins, all

of which he rented to the colored people, except the large one that stood in the center of the settlement. This building boasted of four rooms downstairs and two attic rooms, besides a passage running through the middle of the house that had originally been opened at both ends, but had afterwards been boarded up with a rude door and window cut in the front. This cabin had been built by the first Bolling settling at The Hedges and was occupied by two generations before the building of the mansion. Aunt Peachy's family had virtually owned this cabin, even in slave times. Her father before her had lived in it and now her descendants swarmed like bees around a rotting hive. She had always had a room at the great house, but until the last ten years, before she became so feeble, she had divided her time between the cabin and her room, which was off the kitchen at The Hedges.

Philip had been powerless to effect much change in Aunt Peachy's house. It was almost as filthy and unkempt as ever. But he had worked wonders on the rented cabins, sternly threatening to evict any tenants who did not comply with his regulations. His father had turned the collecting of rents over to his son. It made no difference to Rolfe Bolling in what condition the property was kept, providing he

received his rents regularly. Up to this time Philip had been able to accomplish no improvements beyond a general cleaning and a wholesale whitewashing. Philip's dream was to make enough money on the farm, above what his father expected, to provide a surplus to be used in converting The Quarters into a model settlement. It could be done with time and energy and a little money. It was beautifully situated on a ledge on the side of a hill overlooking the busy little river. A fine spring furnished excellent water to its inhabitants, although to their minds water was one of the least of blessings.

As Robert Taylor passed The Quarters he encountered a little band of small darkeys on their way home from school. He was astonished to note the improvement in the children. He could hardly believe they belonged to The Quarters. He remembered them on a former visit he had paid the settlement on the business of getting extra labor for the hub factory as being mere ill-mannered tatterdemalions. Now they were a neatly dressed lot of children, carrying their books proudly and actually speaking to him politely.

"That Bolling boy is what I said, a throwback," he said to himself. "He must have worked to accomplish all this! He must have

worked, and made others work, too. He seems to be capable of the constructive carrying out of plans."

It was a late afternoon in early March. The wheat was showing green in patches through a light snow that had fallen the night before, and which was melting wherever the sun could reach it. The red clay road wound around the rolling hills, cutting the wheat field in two and then dipping suddenly to the straggling hedge that enclosed the yard surrounding the Bolling house.

As soon as the early potatoes had been dug Philip had begun the process of getting the lawn grassed. It would take some time to accomplish a greensward, but a beginning had been made. The stumps of the great trees that had been felled the year before he had dynamited and in their places had planted young trees selected with great care. The hedge around the sunken garden had been trimmed and it was no longer horse high, although it was still hog strong, but the hogs had been removed to a suitable pen made for them at the foot of the hill, far from the house. The fountain had been repaired and the little bronze boy was standing firmly and gracefully on his sturdy legs, holding up the shell to catch the drops as

of old. Again the sun-dial pointed the hour, but its fluted column no longer was used as a back scratcher for fat hogs or razor-backs. The walks had been graveled and flower beds had been spaded and an occasional green shoot was peeping up, in evidence that bulbs had been planted there and the early March sunshine was tempting them to cast off the light snow with which they had been covered.

Could it be the garden would bloom again with violets and daffodil, iris, purple and white, cornflowers and love-in-the-mist! Perhaps Elizabeth again might find time to bring her sewing and sit on the stone bench by the great box bush. Again she might find time to open the little blue leather Shelleys, with their delicate gold tooling, and read "The Skylark" and "The Sensitive Plant."

"Yi! Yi! Yonder that ol' dried up Bob Taylor a comin' in he buggy!" cried Aunt Peachy, peering through the kitchen window, from which a portion of the red road could be seen as it dipped from the hill.

"How you know it's Bob Taylor?" asked Rolfe Bolling.

"Know by my nose an' my two big toes, ter say nothin' er seein' him jes' as plain as I kin see you, my baby. He air settin' up thar

mighty proudified. I been a 'lowin' we'd be hearin' from him 'fo' long, ever sence that day you an' me wa' a leetle bit happy, owin' ter Abe's havin' fetched over the new jug. I done talked too free befo' that thar Spot. But it ain't no harm done. We 'lowed we'd worry them highfalutin' Taylors some, an' I reckon we done did it."

"What you reckon he air comin' over here fur, Mam' Peachy? I ain't got no business with him. My haid ain't none too clar right this minute, so's p'r'aps yo an' me'd better have a dram befo' he gits here. Th'ain't nothin' like a dram fer settin' folks up."

Accordingly the cupboard was opened and the jug tipped by the two. Then Rolfe awaited the arrival of his neighbor in the sitting room, while Aunt Peachy sat crouching in her arm chair in the kitchen, chattering to herself vague snatches of sentences:

"Mill folks on they knees! Done got even wif ol' Pearly Gates! Look down on my baby! Ol Bob Taylor been too bumptious! Yi! Yi! Break they stiff necks! Mam' Peachy done weave a spell what'll cha'm they luck away!"

Philip had driven his mother to the Court House to do some shopping and Rolfe and the old woman were alone in the house. This com-

pelled Rolfe Bolling to answer Major Taylor's knock. His feet in woolen socks, with no shoes, he padded to the front door and opened it to his visitor.

As the two old men entered the sitting room Aunt Peachy crept from the kitchen, slid along the hall, taking her stand at the half-closed door, where she stood in the shadow, eagerly listening to the conversation between her master and Major Taylor.

The master of Mill House immediately stated the cause of his visit, explaining that his son had told him what he had heard when he had driven over to The Hedges to get Rebecca.

"I am sure my father bought the property later on from your father, when he decided to enlarge the plant—that was before either one of us was born. I believe we are about the same age. My father told me of the transaction. I will be frank with you and tell you that as far as I know there is no record extant of the transaction, owing to the fact that when the Yankees attempted to burn the court house some of the deed books disappeared. On investigation, I find that the very one that must have held the deed conveying the land where my hub factory stands is missing. My father's papers were not carefully filed and I do not remember seeing

a record of the deed among them. At any rate I cannot find it. Of course, it never entered Father's head that there ever would be any trouble about it. The land has been paid for once, but whenever the one hundred years which would mark the expiration of the original lease, is up, I will be willing to pay for it again, if no record of the deed is found in the meantime."

"Yi! Yi! Ol' foxy Bob Taylor done come a beggin' favors from the Bollin's!" squealed Aunt Peachy, sidling into the room. "No, us-all ain't a gwine ter let yer have nothin' er ourn. I'm here ter tell yer my baby ain't a gwine ter listen ter yo' pleadin.' Tell it ter him, my baby, tell it yerse'f! Tell him how he's allus been a holdin' up his haid too high fer us-all on this side er the ribber! Tell him how he done been onneighborlylike ter us, him an' his paw befo' him, an' his grampaw befo' his paw. Tell him how his niggers looks down on yo' niggers an' it air a gonter stop!"

Major Taylor looked at the old negress with a frown.

"Excuse me, Mr. Bolling, but would it be possible for us to have a few moments of uninterrupted conversation?"

His host grinned a rather sickly grin.

"'Tain't nobody but ol' Mam' Peachy," he said apologetically. "You kin go on talkin' jes' the same befo' Mam' Peachy."

For a moment the old woman straightened up her bent back and stood before Major Taylor with an air of defiance. There was for a flash something almost queenly in her bearing, but she could hold the position for only a moment, and then sank back into the crooked state that her great age entailed on her.

"Yi! Yi! Nobody but ol' Mam' Peachy; but me'n my baby air o' one min' consarnin' all the Mill folks! You kin tell that thar big yaller-haided son er yo's that 'tain't no use'n him a makin' eyes at our Betsy. We ain't a gonter put up with no foolishness with us's young lady. She air too good fer the likes er him, but we knows moughty well that Taylor men air allus a seekin' something higher'n what they is, an' Taylors air got a way er lookin' down on Bollin's."

Major Taylor ignored the old woman's tirade, but he felt the blood boiling in his veins and was conscious that his face was red and the hand that held his hat trembled a little.

"I asked you, Mr. Bolling to discuss with me the selling for the second time the hub factory site."

"My baby ain't a-gonter sell nothin'!" screamed Aunt Peachy.

"I ain't a-gonter sell it,' agreed Rolfe Bolling.

"Well, then renew the lease that you hold," urged Major Taylor, with a note of pleading in his voice. He was thinking of Rebecca and trying to keep down his temper, which was almost getting the better of him.

"Yi! Yi! Ol' Bob Taylor a arskin' favors! No, us ain't a gonter rent ter yer, neither. The lan' air ourn an' the things what is built on the lan' air ourn. That's what the l'yer done tol' my baby. Yer ain't got much mo'n two months ter git, neither, yer ol' scrumdudgeon!"

The visitor arose in a fury. Without a word to Rolfe Bolling he walked out of the room.

"Don't fergit ter gib my message ter that there big yaller-haided Spot," Aunt Peachy called out as he pulled the front door open with an anger that was blinding him. The last thing he heard as he climbed into his buggy was the old woman's high, shrill cackle.

"Now, Mam' Peachy, yer oughtn't ter a spoke so roughlike ter Maje Taylor," whined Rolfe Bolling as he turned from the window from which he had been viewing the back of his infuriated neighbor.

"Oh, shet yo' mouf!" she shouted. "I air got mo' sense in my wool than you has in yo' haid. I tells you ter let ol' Mam' Peachy git the reins an' she'll drive over that ol' Bob Taylor till he's so flattened out he won't have no mo' thickness ter him than a inyon peel. Ain't the l'yer done tol' you what yo' rights air?"

"Yes, but he done said ter lay low about it!"

'Well, I wa' a layin' low, as low as a snake's hips. You'd better not be a bossin' er me. I ain't takin' no bossin' from you nor no other white man. Do yer understan'?" panted Aunt Peachy hoarsely.

Chapter 19

AUNT PEACHY GLOATS

Philip and his mother met Major Taylor near The Quarters. Philip turned his horse from the clay road to give his neighbor room to pass. To the young man's cordial bow and cheery "Good afternoon, sir!" the Major gave only a formal bend of the head and a perfunctory touching of his hat. He did not stop, but drove rapidly by.

"Now what is the matter?" asked Philip. "Major Taylor has been so cordial and kind to me when I have met him lately; I can't see why he is so stiff and formal now."

' Oh, my dear, I am afraid it is something to do with your father and that old paper he found about the hub factory. He and Aunt Peachy have been whispering about it a lot lately, and when Mr. Spottswood Taylor was over here that time they were both so under the influence of that mountain whisky she said terrible things. You thought she was not responsible and did not know what she was talking about, but I believed all the time she did."

Elizabeth was close to tears. She had seen for some time that her little Betsy's fancy was leaning decidedly towards the handsome Spottswood Taylor, and she could not but feel that the match would be advantageous. She longed to have her daughter free from the baleful surroundings of The Hedges. Of course, if her husband plunged into what she could not but consider this disgraceful business of ruining the fortunes of the Taylors, one could hardly expect them to receive a daughter of the house of Bolling with open arms.

Betsy, her mother divined, was beginning to show decided signs of being in love. She was a little moody, more particular than usual about her appearance and dress, finding new ways to arrange her pretty hair and forever laundering a blue linen dress, for which Rebecca had told her Spottswood had expressed admiration.

Elizabeth did not try to persuade herself that the Taylors would approve of the match, but she was sure that her dear Betsy could eventually make even the austere Evelyn and Myra like her if she were married to their brother. Betsy was so sweet, so bright and gay, so good-humored and obliging. Major Taylor already liked her girl. Of course he had not contemplated her as a daughter-in-law, and he might

have raised objections, but no doubt those objections could have been overcome. But now —now that Betsy's father was preparing to do this heinous thing, Major Taylor could hardly be expected to consent to the match.

When they reached home it was easy to gather from Aunt Peachy's chuckling innuendoes what had occurred during the visit of the master of Mill House. Philip had it out with his father, plainly showing his disgust at what he was contemplating.

"You can't mean that you will take advantage of this old lease you have found to try to ruin Major Taylor! You say you can claim all the buildings on the land by law? Well, father, if such is the case, there is something mighty rotten about the law. You will lose the respect of the whole county if you keep to the letter of such a law."

"Listen ter the young marster a tryin' ter boss he pappy! Tellin' he pappy he don't know he own business!" cackled Aunt Peachy, who had slipped into the room after listening at the keyhole. She never lost an opportunity to make Rolfe Bolling think Philip was belittling him and in that way she kept ever in the father's heart a certain resentment towards his son.

"Don't yer listen ter him, my baby! Money is what folks respect an' you go on an' git all er ol' Bob Taylor's money."

Aunt Peachy bitterly resented the fact that the people of her own race, even her own blood, had failed in their allegiance to her, who had been queen for a hundred years. Rolfe Bolling was the one person over whom she held undisputed sway, and more than ever did she rule him with a rod of iron. When a third person was present she made a show of respect for him, but when they were alone he might in truth have been her baby, so much did she treat him like one.

The old negress spent her nights in weaving weird spells, making strange-looking figures of putty, tying up bits of bone and hair in filthy rags, which next day she concealed about the house under carpets or mattresses, behind pictures, in Elizabeth's work basket, even in Philip's pockets when she could get to them without being caught. The remarkable thing about Aunt Peachy was that she believed in her own powers of magic, and Rolfe Bolling believed in them, too. He was afraid of his old nurse. His feeling for her was divided between hate and love. He had loved her until lately and now

there were times when he really hated her. That was when he was sober. At such times he took pleasure in the fact that his son had the upper hand on the farm and that the darkeys obeyed his orders instead of Aunt Peachy's.

The old woman would reproach him with his weakness in letting Philip be the master, but he would look slyly at her and say, "If you ain't able ter conquer the boy, how you 'spec' me ter do it?"

He watched the work of restoration on the desecrated lawn and sunken garden and said nothing. Perhaps a spark of the noble founder of the race was still smouldering in his soul and all pride of family and tradition was not dead within him. He understood now that Aunt Peachy had persuaded him to have the lawn plowed up, the trees cut and the garden given over to the hogs to spite his wife and Philip. He had not quite understood it at the time he gave the orders and Aunt Peachy's offspring carried them out. He could remember very little about having been a party to the vandalism. It had occurred after the arrival of a fresh jug from the mountains, and he had not been in a state to remember what took place. He could recall that when the great trees were felled

he had very much the same feeling of finality and sorrow that had been with him at his father's funeral. He was glad that Philip had planted more trees in the old spots — glad, and he hoped they would live and grow in spite of the spells against them that Aunt Peachy was making.

The old woman was too feeble and too fearful of the cold to go out on the lawn to do any damage to the trees, but she took a dry branch that was brought in with the fire wood, and wrapping it with carpet ravelings and smearing it with rancid fat, she mumbled over it inarticulate and cryptic words and then solemnly burned it. Afterwards she announced to her master that the trees Philip had planted would surely die. and now with March the sap had begun to rise in the young trees and a faint, almost imperceptible color on the tip ends of the branches gave promise of budding leaves. The old woman noted this with fury. Hers had been a religion of hate. Always had she worked charms for evil, for the undoing of her enemies, and when misfortune befell anyone she was quite confident that she was responsible for it. Her followers had believed in her power until lately. Every ill that flesh was heir to they had traced to the

dread machinations of Mam' Peachy and she was as firm a believer in her powers as any one of the darkeys in the county.

Aunt Peachy had never forgiven Aunt Pearly Gates for breaking up the Voodoo ceremony held down in the clearing by the river. She had never forgiven her and had spent many hours and great ingenuity in the charms and spells she was determined to work against the pious Pearly Gates. Decade after decade had passed and still she never forgot the ignominy she had felt when her frenzied meeting had been turned into a Christian ceremony. She kept on trying to bring misfortune on her enemy by the weaving of many and various spells. Finally the news came to her that Pearly Gates had had a stroke of paralysis. The doctor had given some hope that she might recover the use of her limbs, but Aunt Peachy believed she could keep her in the bed forever. She was sure she had accomplished this evil thing. She immediately went to see her poor victim and gloated over the fact that she was laid low.

It was rather irritating that Pearly Gates would not acknowledge her power, but talked steadily about the goodness of God and the Blood of the Lamb having power to heal her. It would have been more satisfactory had she

been able to persuade Pearly Gates that she, and she alone, had brought this misfortune on her. She had left her with the parting announcement that she would never be any better, no matter what the doctor said—that she, Mam' Peachy, would see to it that she never got out of bed. A day had never passed in all the twenty years that Aunt Pearly Gates had been bedridden that the wretched old black woman had not endeavored to work her spells against the invalid. Not only did she work them, but she saw to it from time to time the news was taken to her victim that she had not forgotten her. Long ago the doctor had ceased his visits to Aunt Pearly Gates. Her case was given up as hopeless.

It was a fly in the ointment that Pearly Gates refused to acknowledge to anyone the fear she had for Mam' Peachy. The one time that she had confessed it to Rebecca was the only weakness she had shown in the twenty years of her invalidism. She had held firmly to her faith in the goodness of God, proclaiming it at all times. Nobody but her faithful Si knew of her dark hours, when belief in Mam' Peachy's evil power got the better of her belief in the all-loving Father's infinite tenderness and mercy. She never openly confessed it even to

Si, but sometimes he could hear her praying in the night when she thought he was asleep. He respected her wish for concealment of what both of them considered a disgraceful fear, and the old man would silently pray with her.

Chapter 20

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROOF

"Oh, Aunt Pearly Gates, life is very hard right now! It isn't that it is so hard for me. I'm getting on well enough, except, of course, my aunts are as cold as ever to me—I reckon they always will be that. It's because they don't believe I'm their kin. I'm sure I don't want to be, and if I could be of Grandfather's blood and Uncle Spot's, I'd be perfectly willing to forego the honor of being even their poor kin.

"It's Uncle Spot and Grandfather that are having such a hard time. You see poor Uncle Spot has fallen head over heels in love with Betsy Bolling, and Grandfather and Mr. Bolling are having a law suit, and although Betsy is just crazy about Uncle Spot she won't have him because Grandfather is so opposed, and then she is so mortified at the way her own father is behaving. For my part, I believe Mr. Bolling is losing his mind."

"He ain't never had none to lose, Beck baby, ain't ol' Rolfe Bolling. He ain't never had no min' an' no manners an' what heart he may er

had in the fust beginning is done been blackened an' 'taminated long ago by ol' Mam' Peachy. He wa'n't nachelly sech a bad boy, but she done got holt er him an' give him the wrong start. I had hopes that Miss Elizabeth, his wife, wa' a gonter help him some, but Mam' Peachy wa' too strong fer her. I reckon Rolfe Bolling marryin' into that mounting fambly wa' about the onlies' thing he ever done in all his life that Mam' Peachy didn't have a han' in. I don't know how come he flew the coop then. She wa' as mad as hops an' she ain't never forgib Miss Elizabeth fer a marryin' er what she calls her baby."

Rebecca had come to see her old friend to tell her of the sad happenings at Mill House. She hoped that Aunt Pearly Gates might have some solution to offer for the muddle affairs were in.

"What does Mr. Philip say ter all this here carryin' on? 'Tain't likely he a gonter set still an' let his paw ruin Marse Bob."

"Oh, poor Philip is doing everything in his power to make his father stop, but Aunt Peachy keeps on persuading Mr. Bolling to try and get back the hub factory property, and he is just like a real baby with her. He is afraid of her, too, I believe.

"It's right funny, but everybody talks to me about the business. Philip has told me a lot about it. He thinks the law and equity court will decide in favor of Grandfather in spite of Mr. Bolling's holding that old lease and the deed books being gone, burnt or something."

"Laws-a-mussy, Beck baby, I kin 'member moughty well that time the word went 'roun' that the Yankees wa' a coming. They done burnt a lot er co't houses, so they said, an' the chanct wa' they wa' a gonter burn ourn. Some er the men got ter wuck an' tuck all the things out'n the buildin' befo' the sojers got there an' then when some drunken sojers started ter fire the place a awfficer come a ridin' up with his saber a glintin' in the sun an' he drove off the drunks an' set a gyard ter protec' the prop'ty. Them there books an' sech would a been saf't enough. Somebody done stole them books. Mo'n likely the Yankees. Some folks'll jes' steal fer stealin's sake.

"Air Mr. Spot takin' on much 'bout his sweetheart?"

"Poor Uncle Spot! He most breaks my heart. He doesn't eat and I don't believe he is sleeping either, he looks so black under his eyes. I didn't know he loved Betsy so much, but he told me the other day that he had been think-

ing about having her for his wife ever since she was a little young girl. He'd go ahead in spite of Grandfather if Betsy would just have him. He says he is farmer enough to make a living for her, even if Grandfather won't let them live at Mill House. But Betsy won't have him, although she had already about got engaged to him.

"It was the very afternoon that Grandfather went over to see Mr. Bolling, that day in March. I had a cold and didn't go to school, but Uncle Spot made out he had forgotten about it and walked over to the mill to meet me, just as he had been doing—except he always drove. Of course this walking over was right foxy in Uncle Spot, 'cause it would be right hard to make love to a girl when you were in one buggy and she was in the other. As it was, he got in Betsy's old buggy. She was alone. Jo was sick with a cold, too. At least he pretended to be. And, Oh, Aunt Pearly Gates, I wish I could have been there! I am mighty excited about being mixed up in a real romance.

"Betsy told me a little about it, but she was too shy to tell me everything. She didn't know how far Mr. Bolling had gone about that old hub factory land and she told Spot she liked him a little—at least that is what she *said* she

said—but I believe she said more than that, because that night before supper I found Uncle Spot sitting in the library and he looked so happy I just know she said something besides just *liking*.

"I used to think Uncle Spot was sullen looking, but I can't see how I ever did. He has a solemn face, but it isn't sullen any more. Even now when he and Grandfather have had such terrible words between them he hasn't taken back his old look, but has a kind of sweet, sad expression. I just know he is remembering *the kiss* I think Betsy must have given him.

"Well, Grandfather said terrible things about the Bollings, all but Philip, and he spared him just because he brought me to Mill House. He said he'd never give his consent to the marriage and if Spot chose to disgrace his family by even contemplating such a thing he could leave home. I guess my father must have had just such a talk with Grandfather, only he wanted to wed his art.

"Poor Uncle Spot did not have to choose between his home and his sweetheart, 'cause before we went to bed that night, after Uncle Spot told about his kind of engagement, a colored man named Young Abe came riding over on a mule with a note from Betsy and I reckon she

told Uncle Spot good-bye forever in that note, because he cried a little. I saw him."

Aunt Pearly Gates stopped tatting for a moment and reached carefully under the covers of her bed, an intent expression on her good old face.

Rebecca paused and looked at the old woman.

"'Scuse me a minute, honey chil', I's a listenin' ter yer an' so interested in my white folks an' they troubles I come moughty nigh fergittin' I wa' a settin'. I got a duck aig in here by mistake an' Gawd in Heaven knows what I'm a gonter do with a baby duck. Duck aigs takes fo' weeks to hatch. I put the settin' in 'thout payin' it much min'. Si brought it ter me goin' on three weeks ago, an' it wa' 'bout come dusk an' I couldn't see any too clear. I never would a knowed it if Si hadn't a got ter huntin' that aig. He wa' a gonter stir up a lil' batter braid an' th'ain't nothin' mo' rich like in the way er eatin' than duck aigs in batter braid. He 'lowed he put it in the chaney bowl an' he looked an' looked till he wa' all tuckered out lookin'. Po' Si has a hard time with me a laid up in the baid all these years an' him sech a han' fer losin' things. I reckon he'd been better off if he had er los' me twenty years ago an' then he wa' still a right spry nigger an' he mought a got

another wife. I'm 'fraid he couldn't git nobody wuth her salt ter marry him now."

"Oh, dear Aunt Pearly Gates, please don't talk that way! Uncle Si adores you and all of us adore you. Even the aunts love you, and if you should leave us there would be nothing but sadness at Mill House. Philip and Betsy and Jo love you, too."

"Well, sometimes I gits moughty low in my min'. When my folks is havin' so much trouble an' sorrow it seems lak I worry so over them an' what with settin' an' all I reckon I ain't had a wink er sleep fer nigh on ter a week.

"I ain't quite clar in my min' 'bout what ol' Rolfe Bollin' is claimin', but I is sho' er one thing, an' that is if they is a law in the lan' what will take Marse Robert's hub fact'ry away from him, hide an' har, an' han' it over ter Rolfe Bollin', who ain't never done a hones' ter Gawd day's wuck in his life, why, then they's something the matter with the law an' I ain't near so ap' ter feel lak 'bidin' by it. I reckon I'd have a hard time a breakin' the law a layin' up here in the baid, but I'd feel lak a tryin' ter do it."

Rebecca laughed. The picture of gentle old Aunt Pearly Gates breaking the law was funny.

"Well, break the law, but don't break your eggs. Maybe I'd better not tell you any more

about our troubles, because you do such sad talking about dying and Uncle Si marrying again," Rebecca suggested.

"Laws-a-mussy, chil', go on an' talk. My white folks been a comin' down here ter ol' Pearly Gates' cabin a tellin' her they troubles fer so long I couldn't stan' my 'zistence 'thout I felt lak I done some good jes' a listenin' ter miseries. What else is a worryin' you, honey chil'?"

"I wasn't going to mention my other worries, 'cause you have enough to think about. I guess you can see I am bothered about something without my telling you. You are so sympathetic, Aunt Pearly Gates."

"Well, honey baby, I kin see a lil' line on yo' forehaid what don' b'long thar an' I notice a look in yo' eyes what is wrong ter see in a lil' gal what ain't mo'n in her teens. What is it, Beck baby?"

"Oh, Aunt Pearly Gates, sometimes I am afraid I'm not named Taylor after all. If I am, why doesn't Mrs. O'Shea answer my letters? Why doesn't she send Daddy's books to me? Grandfather has written, too, and she doesn't answer his letters either, or if she has answered them he hasn't told me.

"I may be nothing but an impostor after all,

if there is no proof of my being what I always thought I was. Since this business has come up about the hub factory and I have heard so much talk about the importance of proof, I feel worse and worse that there is no proof about me."

Rebecca wiped away her tears and tried to smile. Her old friend looked sadly at her and with gentle words tried to comfort her.

"You is you, no matter who you mought be," she asserted, "an' Marse Bob loves you 'cause you is you; an' Mr. Spot air took wif you 'cause you is you. Becky baby mustn't go worry too much 'bout them letters an' things. Maybe you needs mo' fun in life than you air gittin'."

"Oh, I have a splendid time! I like my school in spite of being behind in arithmetic. You see my Daddy used to say that the adding machine had done away with all necessity for amateur mathematics, and I hardly know a bit of arithmetic. I am ahead of the others in history and geography and spelling, and I must say most of them read like they were spelling while they are reading.

"I am astonished to see how many things happen in the country. I used to think that the country would be a place where nothing happened but just crops and weather, but some-

thing is going on all the time. I do miss the shows I used to see in New York, but do you know, Aunt Pearly Gates, that Uncle Spot is going to take me to a show at the Court House this very night? I am real excited about it.

"Poor Uncle Spot was going to get up a real party for this show and ask Mr. Philip Bolling and Betsy and Jo, but now he can't do it because of the letter Young Abe brought over on the mule. He can't trust himself to say a word to Betsy now. Even when he takes me to the mill to meet her in the morning he only touches his hat and never says a word to her. I am sure his heart is most breaking. And Betsy is looking pale and thin. It is too bad, when she is to graduate now in a few weeks, and she is the favorite of her class, too, and now she won't look near so pretty as she should with her roses all turned to lilies. I'm going to come down to-morrow and tell you all about the show, Aunt Pearly Gates."

"Well, I ain't never seed a show an' they is some chu'ch mimbers what claims they is mos'ly run by the debble, but I 'low I'd like ter see one fust rate. What kin' er show is it?"

"I think it's a vaudeville and there will be singing and dancing and acrobatic performances."

"Sounds lak a circus. I ain't seed a circus fer so long I done mos' forgot they wa' sech a thing. I sho' did useter love a circus. I's glad you is a goin' ter have a nice time, honey chil', an' I'm glad Mr. Spot air gonter fergit his troubles fer a piece."

Chapter 21

THE DANCING MAMMA IS FOUND

Philip determined that Betsy and her mother and Jo needed some diversion, too, and accordingly persuaded them to accompany him to the show at the Court House. Theatrical performances were few and far between, and when a show was given the town hall was always crowded.

The Bollings and Taylors arrived at the same time, the horses were hitched to adjoining posts, and as Philip entered the hall with his mother and sister, Spottswood Taylor and Rebecca were immediately behind them.

"Let's all sit together," suggested Rebecca, slipping her arm in Mrs. Bolling's, whose other arm was held by her son, while Jo crowded in next to Rebecca.

The hall was already beginning to fill, and six seats in a row not being available, what more natural than that Rebecca should remain with her friends and Spot and blushing Betsy should have to take their seats side by side a little removed from the rest?

"God bless Rebecca!" Spot whispered in a tone almost inaudible, but Betsy heard him and blushed again.

The show was like any other traveling vaudeville booked to play in small towns. There was the usual song-and-dance Irish comedian and the usual soprano who sang the latest sentimental songs in a voice that one hoped had seen better days. There was an act by trained dogs and one by pigeons, with the burning of the tiny paper house and the fire brigade of sleek, intelligent birds.

The company brought its own orchestra—a violinist and pianist. After the pigeon act all lights were turned off and the music changed from the tinkling tunes appropriate for the bird act to a mad whirling dance. A red spotlight was thrown on the stage and in it could be seen the swaying, graceful figure of a lovely young woman, with flashing, devil-may-care eyes and a saucy carmine mouth with teeth so white they looked almost cruel.

When the small orchestra played the opening bars of the mad dance Rebecca unconsciously clutched Philip's arm on one side and Jo's on the other. Her breath came in short gasps and for a moment she closed her eyes. She opened them on the swaying, whirling, beautiful dancer.

"The dagger is in her bodice!" she whispered. "Watch! After the next movement she will snatch it out! Oh, Mr. Philip Bolling, that is Mamma!"

The child gave a great sob and trembled violently. Philip put his arm around her and whispered, "Do you want me to take you out?"

"Oh, no ! I must see her! She is all that is left of my old life! That is the dance she danced to make Daddy fall in love with her. That is the dance she danced when poor Papa died. Oh, Mr. Philip Bolling, when it is over take me behind the scenes and let me speak to her."

"Of course I will."

The music rose to wild heights and with a final twirl the dancer plunged the glinting dagger into an imaginary victim; then gave a piercing shriek and sank in a glowing heap on the floor.

"How can she? How can she? That is exactly the shriek she gave when poor Papa died," shuddered Rebecca. "Can we go now?"

With a word to his mother, who was always a person to understand quickly and to accept unquestionably, and one to Jo to look after his mother, Philip led Rebecca from the hall, and

then by a narrow passage they made their way to the back of the little stage.

"This young lady wants to speak to the dancer," he explained to the manager of the show, who combined in his one person scene shifter, prompter, ladies' maid, electrician and curtain raiser. He was engaged at the time in hooking up the dress of a young woman soon to go on in the one-act play with which the performance closed.

"You mean Nell Morgan? Sure, you can speak to her. She'll have to answer her encore first. Nell always gets an encore on that dagger dance."

They waited for what seemed an interminable time to Rebecca while the music again pulled her heartstrings with memories of the death of her stepfather. Over at last! The dancer came tripping behind the scenes.

"Party wants to speak to you!" said the manager over his shoulder as he slid on some scenery.

"Me? I don't know a soul in this God-and-man-forsaken burg."

Rebecca came forward. "Don't you know me, Mamma?"

"I'm not anybody's Mamma, thank goodness! Guess again, kid! Why, bless my soul, if it

ain't little Rebecca! Heavens, child! Where on earth did you come from? Now I remember that old O'Shea did tell me you had gone to Virginia. I was mad enough, too, when I found you had taken my widow's bonnet with you—worn it off. I didn't have a rag of black to show respect for my poor dead husband. But he liked you better than he did me and it was right for you to wear the widow's weeds, I reckon.

"What did your father's folks think of having their po' kin sent back on their hands? If I had known about them I certainly would have shipped you to them long ago. I never thought of looking in that old trunk. I might have found those letters and if you hadn't been there your Daddy and I would have been living together yet—that is, of course, provided he hadn't got sick. I can't bear sick folks—never could. I knew all the time he liked you better than he did me—found you more his class. He was a clever guy—poor old fellow!"

All this she rattled off without stopping. She asked questions, but never waited for an answer.

"You've changed a lot, child! I reckon you get better eats than you did on Tenth Street."

"I'm real glad to see you," faltered Rebecca. "Do you know why Mrs. O'Shea doesn't answer

my letters? You saw her in New York after I left?"

"The old fool has shipped as stewardess on a slow ship sailing to Calcutta. The Lord knows where she is by this time. Married to a Chinee, more than likely. I went to the studio and got my things. You know everything there belonged to me," she added a little fiercely. "I never got a real divorce from my husband."

"I never thought—I guess there wasn't much left there, 'cause I had to sell so much to keep things going when Daddy was sick."

"Oh, don't talk about it. Didn't you just hear me say I couldn't bear sick folks?"

"No, I won't mention it, but Mamma—I can't help calling you Mamma—do you know what became of the trunk full of letters that belonged to my own father?"

"Sure! I sent them to storage with all the other junk. More fool me, too! No doubt the storage bill will be more than the stuff is worth. I always was a sentimentalist, though, and I couldn't bear to part with the things."

"Oh, Mamma, could you send the trunk to me here in Virginia? I want you to meet Mr. Philip Bolling. He is my neighbor and the best friend I have here," she exclaimed as Philip stepped forward.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Bolling," said the dancer.

"Bless you, Rebecca, I'm not going back to New York for months. I'm booked up with these barnstormers until July and then I'm going to make tracks for Georgia and see my folks."

"You might give Rebecca an order on the warehouse company for the trunk," suggested Philip, producing a fountain pen and tearing a sheet from his note book. "The trunk is marked, is it not, Rebecca?"

"Oh, yes! T. Taylor is on one end and it is plastered all over with foreign labels. It is a small leather trunk."

"You will give the order, won't you?" Philip asked with respectful courtesy that appealed to the pretty dancer.

"Sure, if you ask it. Write out the order; describe the trunk. Make it out to bearer and let me sign it. It's the Victory Warehouse Corporation. You'll have to pay the back storage, though, before you can take anything out," she added shrewdly.

"I believe Grandfather would not mind, no matter what it costs," said Rebecca.

"So your folks are rich?"

"No, not rich—at least not now—" and then

Rebecca saw the blood mount to Philip's forehead and she wished she had not said such a thing.

"Lost their money? Oh, well, folks that can't keep what they have don't deserve it! Well, so long, kid! I have a date. Hope the old letters will get to you safely. I don't bear you any grudge, even if you did steal my husband from me and then take my widow's weeds."

With an airy wave of her hand, the woman turned from the child with perfect indifference.

Rebecca's lip trembled a bit, but she forced a smile and looked up into Philip's eyes.

"She was always that way. But, anyhow, we have the order for the trunk and before long we'll have the trunk. Then — then — I won't be poor kin any more, but belong to the Taylor family just as much as Aunt Myra and Aunt Evelyn and Uncle Spot. Oh, Mr. Philip Bolling, you are always saving me and seeing me through!"

Chapter 22

A TERRIFIED CONJURER

Aunt Peachy spent more and more time over her charms, in an endeavor to find some spell that would be more potent than the tricks she was sure Philip was up to. Betsy had said he was a better charm worker than she was and surely nothing short of conjuring could have won over all the colored contingent to his side. Even her own son, Old Abe, and all of his descendants had left her completely. They seldom came near her now, not even to bring the choice morsels of scandal that she longed to hear since she had become too feeble to go out in the world in search of amusement.

Sometimes she even fancied that Rolfe Bolling was no longer subject to her powerful and evil will. Her piercing eyes had lately caught a look in his of hate. She knew he feared her —she meant that he should but she craved his love with an eagerness she had never felt for her own offspring. She had a suspicion that if it were not for her determination that he should push Major Taylor to the utmost the law

allowed, Bolling would weakly give in to the wishes of his family and let the whole matter drop. For this reason she never let the subject grow cold but talked about it continually, constantly picturing to her master the wealth and distinction that would be his when he got possession of the hub factory.

She raked up old scores between the Taylors and Bollings, exaggerating the importance of bygone trifling disagreements until she made it seem that a regular feud had always existed between the owners of The Hedges and Mill House. She hated Philip with a venom that poisoned her whole system.

"The sight er him makes my victuals bitter in my mouf," she would mutter, "an' 'fo' Gawd if he don' eben tu'n my liquor agin me."

She longed to know in what his superior conjuring powers differed from her own. It never entered her head that he did not employ some occult methods to gain his ends.

The attic had become more and more Philip's place of refuge. Not only was it the one place that Aunt Peachy never entered, but it was the respository of his books and tools, his drugs and chemicals. There he worked and read, there his mother came for the quiet chats, there his little neighbor Rebecca would find her way when he

had finished the farm labors, and curling up in an old chair that he had unearthed from a dark corner, she would talk to him as she did to no other person, not even her grandfather.

During the cold months, when work on the farm was slack, Philip had determined to try to repair some of the beautiful old bits of discarded furniture piled up under the eaves of his attic refuge. Some must be scraped with broken glass and some must be treated with a strong concoction to take off the cracking varnish that had been foolishly applied by some Bolling housewife who wanted shiny furniture. Aunt Peachy would sniff suspiciously when the odor of this varnish destroyer reached her nostrils, and then with head on one side she would listen to the mysterious sound of persistent scraping.

Philip had finally moved a cot up into the attic, because he was constantly being annoyed by Aunt Peachy slipping into his bed room. Sometimes he would awaken in the night, conscious of her presence. At the slightest movement on his part she would be gone like a startled rat. At last he moved his clothes to the attic, too, as one of her conjuring tricks was to put strange parcels of incongruous and nondescript articles in the pockets of his suits, in the toes of his shoes or in the lining of an over-

coat. The bones of a salt herring wrapped in an old rabbit skin and sewed up in his pillow, where it smelled most vilely, was the last straw that made him determine to sleep in his beloved attic.

By the early morning light he always paid his respects to the ancestor hanging over the highboy, the charming gentleman in cue and stock. Philip had looked him up in the family annals and knew him to be the one responsible for the sunken garden and the beautiful proportions of The Hedges.

"I couldn't look you in the face, old fellow, if I were not bringing back some of the beauty of the place," he would say to the portrait. "I'm slow but I am sure."

Philip's move was but added irritation to Aunt Peachy. More and more she brooded over it.

"He air sech a debble he ain't eben scairt er hants," she muttered as she crouched in her chair. Not often was her cackle heard in the last weeks. She muttered and groaned and fashioned strange things of rags and clay or bits of putty with her clawlike hands. The only time when she seemed like herself was just after a visit to the jug, which needed more frequent replenishings than formerly.

"I's as big a debble as he is," she declared to

herself after a copious swig from the tin cup. "If hants cyarn't hurt him they cyarn't hurt me. I'm gonter show him an' show him this very night."

It was the evening of the vaudeville performance at the Court House and Rolfe Bolling and his old nurse were to be left alone while Philip took his mother and sister and Jo to the show. Elizabeth had been doubtful about the advisability of leaving them but had been cackled down by Aunt Peachy.

"Sho'! Go on! My baby an' me air took keer er each other befo' any mounting po' whites ever come along an' we kin go on a keepin' keer er each other. Ain't it the truf, my baby?"

Rolfe had merely grunted. He had a kind of nameless terror lately of being left alone with Mam' Peachy for any length of time, but he was too much in awe of her to voice his feelings. Before they started Elizabeth had turned down his bed and persuaded him to get in it. He was quite docile in complying with her wishes. He hoped Mam' Peachy would stay in the kitchen or go to her own room.

In the gathering dusk Aunt Peachy watched the family carriage as it disappeared over the hill — watched it with glittering eyes and cursed

it and its occupants with vindictive bitterness.

"All but Betsy and Jo. I ain't got no cuss fer Betsy and Jo. If I had er had the bringin' up er po' lil' Jo I could er made him jes' lak my baby," she chattered. "That there Phup never would er been lak him 'case he got too much er his maw in him—his maw an' some er them ol' picshers.

"If I'm a gonter spunk up enough ter go up in that there lof' I must fill my veins up full er liquor," she declared. She deftly opened the cupboard with a bent kitchen fork and poured out a cup full from the brown jug.

"Now I mus' put on my begalia! I kin conjer better in my begalia."

She slipped from the kitchen to her own room, lighted a tallow candle stuck in a bottle, and pulling from under the bed a strange old rawhide trunk, opened it and began to hunt in the conglomeration of its contents for strings of beads and bunches of feathers. She put the beads around her neck and waist, string after string made of bones and buttons and bits of colored glass tied and wired together. On her palsied head she placed a headdress of feathers. Then she took a staff standing in the corner and carefully greased it with an old bacon rind.

"Now cyarn't nothin' ketch me!" she asserted.

She looked around her crowded, filthy room to see if there was anything left undone.

"I'd lak ter see myself. It done been many a day sence I clum' up ter see my image. That there booro air too high fer ol' Mam' Peachy now sence she done got so bent over. She pulled from under the bed a peculiar-looking carpet-covered stool, evidently home made. She stepped up on it and balanced herself precariously with her staff, while she peered in the mirror.

"Sweet debble! Ain't I a sight though?" she cackled. "I could make a white man run, sho' as shootin'. I wisht I had er thought er this begalia sooner an' I could er scairt that there Phup ter death."

With candle in hand she made her way through the house and began slowly to mount the stairs. Heavy breathing from Rolfe Bolling's bedroom gave evidence that her master was asleep. She paused a moment on the landing and endeavored to straighten her bent back, but the effort was too much for her and she was forced to proceed in her usual position with hands almost touching the floor. Indeed when she went upstairs her hands did touch the step immediately above the one on which she was standing.

"I's a debble! I's a debble! As big a debble

as Phup!" she kept muttering to herself as she went slowly up.

The second floor was reached and then she scuttled to the door in the back hall which led to the attic stairs. She stood a long time before this door trying to make up her mind to open it.

"If I gits up thar I kin fin' his conjer and break it up and then I'll be queen bee agin an' I kin bring trouble on him an' his maw. I'm as big a debble as he is! Th'ain't no hants a hanging theyse'fs in that there lof', 'case if they wa' they'd a got Phup long ago 'case he ain't no mo' strong than what I is."

She opened the door and inch by inch went up the steps. On some steps she would stand for many minutes, terror stricken at the thought of going any higher. She would move her feet back and forth along a step, raise a foot and make a tentative motion to mount and then draw it back. Her candle was getting low in the bottle. Some of the tallow dropped on her fingers, burning them. This brought her to a realization that minutes were flying and it might be almost time for the theatre-goers to return. With one more desperate effort the old woman glided up the last four steps and found herself in the dread attic.

"'Tain't nothin' up here," she asserted bravely.

"'Tain't nothin' but ol' broke up furnisher an' I ain't scairt er that. Lemme hide the conjer I done fixed fer my fine gemman, hide it so he cyarn't fin' it an' then fin' out what he makes his cha'ms out'n."

She whipped from her pocket one of her precious charm workers, wrapped in an old sock heel, and deftly slipped it beneath the cot mattress.

"I 'low you won't sleep so easy now, young man."

The attic was dark and the guttering candle only made a blur of light. Aunt Peachy peered uneasily into the black corners, hardly knowing where to begin on her search for the superior conjuring material that she was sure Philip must possess.

"Here that there bottle er stuff what smells so strong!" she exclaimed, putting the candle down on Philip's work table. "I reckon it air rank pizen." She took out the cork and sniffed suspiciously. "Fust I'll git my claws on this here." She tried to put the bottle of varnish remover in her pocket, but it was too large, so she clasped it in her arms.

"What he gonter do with this here broken glass? I betcher he plan to grind it up and put it in us's victuals—me 'n' my baby's. I gonter

beat him to it an' 'fo' Gawd he gonter be a squirmin' in agony this time termorrow. I'll grin' it fine an' git some in that there speshul batter braid what his maw makes so keerful fer him 'thout enough grease in it ter ile a flea's laig."

The old woman laughed gleefully as she carefully picked up the bits of glass that Philip had saved to use for scraping the old mahogany and put it in her capacious pocket.

Suddenly the tallow candle flared up and went out. For a moment she stood terrified. The dark always terrified her, but the stars were shining through the skylight and dimly lighted the attic. She fumbled in her pocket among the bits of broken glass and produced a box of matches.

"He's sho' ter have a candle. I seen one over here," she muttered, striking a match and moving towards the highboy. The match went out just as she reached the highboy, and then she struck another and held it aloft.

From the impenetrable gloom the face of the portrait seemed to spring out at her—the face of the man with his throat wrapped up—he whom she had always thought to be the one who had hanged himself in the attic. Frozen with terror, she backed away from the highboy. The

match burnt itself out and dropped from her nerveless fingers.

Slowly the old woman retreated. She could not turn, could not run. She clasped the bottle of varnish remover tightly in her arms, feeling perhaps it had some potency to keep her from the terrible head that was pursuing her. Suddenly she backed into one of Philip's suits suspended on a coat hanger from a nail in a scantling.

"The hangman hisse'f!" she sobbed.

A piercing shriek resounded through the house, another and another—shrieks so loud and shrill, so blood-curdling, that Rolfe Bolling stirred uneasily in his heavy slumber and opened his eyes.

"Mam' Peachy!" he roared. "Where are you, Mam' Peachy? Help! Help!" he blubbered like a great baby and covered his head with the quilt.

Another shriek! Yet another! A sound of rushing and of a falling body, and then silence!

Chapter 23

THE LOST IS FOUND

"I saw a light in the attic!" Jo exclaimed as they turned a curve in the road.

"I am sure I did, too, just for a moment. Who on earth could be up in the attic?" said Philip.

"Oh, you couldn't have," insisted Betsy, a gay note in her voice, a note that had been woefully lacking lately.

"You know Mam' Peachy is afraid to death of the attic, and the stairs would be fat man's misery for father."

The girl laughed happily. Life wasn't so hard after all. Her handsome lover had shown himself to be so much in earnest that she could not but hope for the future. She wouldn't marry Spottswood while her father and his father were having this terrible law suit, but after a bit things surely would adjust themselves. Maybe her father would lose his suit, which would help matters some.

It had been a delightful evening to Betsy. Spot had been so gentle, so thoughtful, so

grateful for the privilege of sitting by her side! He had begged her to wait—not to give him a final answer and to let him go on loving her.

Philip whipped up the horses and they reached the yard gate just as Aunt Peachy gave her first blood-curdling scream. Then had followed Rolfe Bolling's call for help.

Philip and his mother sprang from the carriage, leaving Betsy and Jo to attend to the horses. They were in the house in a twinkling. All was silent. Rolfe Bolling they found with his head under the bed clothes and his huge bulk trembling with fear.

"What is the matter, Father?" asked Philip, but the old man could only sob like a frightened child.

"Where is Aunt Peachy?" asked his wife.

"It done got her," he finally sobbed out.

"What got her?" asked Philip, gently.

"That thing in the attic! I heard her screaming when it got her."

Elizabeth soothed him, smoothed the covers over his heaving form, and even poured out a drink for him from a bottle on the table by his bedside.

As soon as Philip was assured that his father was merely frightened, he went in

search of Aunt Peachy. He had been sure that he had seen a light in the attic, and with a lamp in hand he mounted the stairs to the second floor. He saw the door to the attic stairs was open. The strong odor of the varnish remover filled the hall. This puzzled him.

"Philip, wait for me!" called Elizabeth. "Your father is all right now."

They found old Aunt Peachy lying at the foot of the steps dressed in her fantastic regalia. Philip almost stepped on her. He drew back with an exclamation of horror.

"I think she is dead, Mother," he whispered. "She must have fallen down the steps."

Aunt Peachy had dried up to the mere semblance of a human being. Her head, with its band of feathers, was twisted under her poor old body. The strings of beads had some of them burst and the stairs were strewn with bones and bits of colored glass and buttons. The bottle of varnish remover had broken and the pungent mixture had made a pool all around her.

"Don't touch her, my boy! Don't touch her!" Elizabeth commanded. "You must get the coroner! You must, I say! Too many times have I thought of killing her, and now that she is dead some one may try to prove I have killed her, I or you. God knows that I have wished

that she were dead for twenty-five years."

Philip was glad not to have to touch the fearsome object. The coroner was soon reached by telephone, and thanks to the habit of country telephones, over which it is impossible to impart a secret, the news of Mam' Peachy's death spread like wildfire through the county. By midnight not only was the coroner at The Hedges, but a crowd of people, white and black, that even a fire would not have attracted.

"Well, the ol' debble air a stokin' up this night," said a colored man to his companion. They had run two miles across country not to miss the excitement of seeing the coroner sit on the remains of the dreaded Mam' Peachy.

"Good Gawd, man! Ain't you scairt ter be a mentionin' er ol' Mam' Peachy so disrumspec'ful like?"

"No, sirree! I ain't scairt no mo'. I done been scairt er her all my life, but I allus heard tell that conjer tricks dies when the conjer ooman dies. When they dies they done loses they grip. I reckon they'll be rejicin' all aroun', now Mam' Peachy air done broke her neck. I done stop at Brer Johnson's cabin ter tell him an' Aunt Pearly Gates the news. They do say him an' her air the onlies' ones 'roun' these here parts what ain't never feared Mam' Peachy."

"Yes, they's a wondrous pair, them two. They's pretty nigh sanctified, I reckon."

The coroner's verdict was "Death by accident." The accident being falling down the steps and breaking her neck. What she was doing up in the attic, attired in strings of beads, with the strange headdress, was none of the coroner's business and he did not attempt to solve the riddle.

Aunt Peachy's descendants down to the fourth and fifth generation came and carried the shrunken corpse to her house in The Quarters. There she lay in state until the following Sunday. Everybody had heard of Mam' Peachy and many were the excursions to view the remains.

"Mam' Peachy air sech a pop'lar corp," Old Abe explained to Philip, "that we is done decided ter charge ter view the remainders. Young Abe thought a nickel wa' enough, but I 'lowed it wa' kinder lowerin' er my mother's 'portance ter chawge only a nickel, so I done put it ter a dime. I ain't los' none by it, either."

Rolfe Bolling took the death of his old nurse quite calmly, much to the relief of his family. He was in a strangely placid state of mind. He seemed like a child who had finally got the whipping he had needed, had accepted his pun-

ishment and was trying to be good. At his wife's suggestion he stayed in bed for several days. He showed gratitude to her for the first time in their married life.

"Elizabeth, you are a good woman," he said, and Elizabeth wept.

"I reckon Mam' Peachy air been a great trial ter you. I'm glad she's dead. She was too strong fer me. I hadn't ought ter let her do you so mean, but she was too strong—too strong."

Philip and his mother determined to burn everything in Aunt Peachy's room. Old Abe was told he could carry off anything he valued, but he wanted nothing.

"I's scairt she mought come back fer her things, so I ain't gonter have none er them 'roun' me," he said. "I 'low burnin' would be the saftes' way."

Accordingly, very early on the morning after the accident they undertook the horrid task. Betsy insisted upon helping, although they hated to have her touch the dirty things found in the old woman's room. Many articles that had been lost by different members of the family were unearthed—things the old woman could not have wanted or used, but that she must have stolen simply for the sake of stealing.

Philip found treasures lost and mourned for in his childhood, when toys were far from plentiful—a top, a chipped agate, a Barlow knife. Elizabeth found the silver spoon on which her children had cut their teeth. Each little dent had been precious to her, and its loss had, at the time of its disappearance, seemed irreparable. Betsy found an envelope of kodak pictures for which she had searched high and low, a small silver vanity box Philip had sent her from New York, a jeweled hat pin and a dotted veil on which she set great store.

The bureau drawers were bursting with useless and filthy odds and ends. A huge trunk in the corner was covered with layer after layer of old blankets, bits of carpet and portieres. The trunk contained nothing but rags and old shoes. Aunt Peachy had allowed nothing in the way of clothing to be thrown away at The Hedges. Rags were on the bed, under the bed and between the feather mattresses. A bonfire was started some distance from the house and as soon as things were gone over they were cast in the flames.

"Burn everything," insisted Elizabeth. "There is no use in looking over these horrible rags."

"Perhaps we had better look before we burn,"

was Philip's cautious reply. "We may find more spoons."

With a few blows of the axe the rickety wooden bedstead made kindling for the fire and then on the pyre were cast carpets, chairs, the bureau, the huge trunk, the small rawhide trunk with the fantastic "begalia," which smelled vilely as it burned.

"Put on that stool next," commanded Elizabeth.

"First I must rip it up. There is no telling what is inside the old carpet sewed around it," insisted Betsy.

The girl sat down on the back porch steps and cut the twine and wires with which the carpet was roughly sewn.

"Look! It's funny old books," she cried. "Three of them! What a ridiculous old woman!" And then Betsy began to laugh and cry at the same time, and her mother and brother hurried to her. "It's the old deed books, the old deed books, lost during the war! Look! Look! Papers dated 'way back in the thirties and forties—even earlier! Oh! Oh! Oh! How happy I am!"

Chapter 24

THE CLOUDS BREAK

"Aunt Pearly Gates, may I come in?" asked Rebecca, knocking on the cabin door.

"Come in, chil', I air sho' glad ter see you."

The old woman had a note of excitement in her voice, and Rebecca found her propped high on her pillows, her eyes shining and her hands folded over the counterpane.

Rebecca had never seen those hands quiet before except on Sunday.

"I've lots to tell you, Aunt Pearly Gates. So much has happened since yesterday. Of course you know about poor old Aunt Peachy."

"Yes, chil', I knows."

"Well, then, I'll begin about myself."

Rebecca told of the show the evening before, of her stepmother's dance and the order for the precious trunk with all the letters — letters she was sure would give proof of her being herself, as she expressed it.

"Even the aunts are interested now. I really believe they have honestly doubted me all the time, and maybe it has been kind of hard on

them having me here. I am sure the letters will clear it all up."

"Honey baby, I am glad, moughty glad. You air a turnin' the sock heel, jes' lak you wa' in my dream."

"Another thing has happened even more important, Aunt Pearly Gates, 'cause it is straightening up what is going to be, and my news is only what was. The future is lots more important than the past. This is Uncle Spot's and Betsy's business and Grandfather's. This morning, just before Grandfather started to the hub factory, who should come driving up to Mill House but Betsy Bolling and Jo. Gee! Aunt Pearly Gates, she was pretty. Her hair was all rumpled and curly and her cheeks were as pink as Cherokee roses. Uncle Spot had gone to the fields, but he recognized the grey colt coming along the road and he hurried back to the house. He got right pale when he saw Betsy was in the buggy. Aunt Myra and Aunt Evelyn were sitting on the front porch with Grandfather waiting for the mail, and I was humped up on the steps, wondering if I would be allowed to go to Aunt Peachy's funeral — something I certainly wanted to do — when Betsy and Jo came driving up. The aunts looked mighty stiff backed and aristocratic, and Grandfather looked

puzzled, but he got up and started down the walk to meet Betsy. She jumped out of the buggy and reached under the seat and pulled out a great package, and without saying a word to Uncle Spot, who was hurrying along to help her, she went to Grandfather and held out the heavy package to him.

"'The deed books,' she said. 'I found them in Aunt Peachy's room.' And do you know, Aunt Pearly Gates, Grandfather just took Betsy and the deed books all in his arms and hugged them and kissed them! I mean, of course, he hugged both of them, but kissed only Betsy. And then there was such another getting together as you never saw. The aunts were gracious and shook hands with Betsy, and Uncle Spot looked like he was going to die right there from absolute happiness. Grandfather apologized for having been so nasty to the Bolling family, and Betsy just laughed and blushed and said she must be going home to help her mother, and Grandfather told Uncle Spot he had better call it a day and lay off and see his sweetheart home—and that's all!".

"Well, Gawd be praised! When Marse Bob do come 'roun' he sho' do come 'roun' right. I reckon he air already plannin' a new wing ter Mill House fer Marse Spot's wife."

"And then, Aunt Pearly Gates, guess what that saucy Jo said!"

"What he say, chil'?" laughed Aunt Pearly Gates.

"He said that he would be my uncle-in-law and I'd have to mind everything he said. And I said it would depend on what he'd tell me to do —and he had the impertinence to whisper that when I grew up he might make me marry him. I told him he'd have to get to be a lot more like his brother before I'd even consider him."

"And what did Marse Bob say to that?"

"Grandfather laughed, and said there would have to be a few more deed books lost and found before he'd consent to any more joining of hands across the water, but he seemed to like Jo because Jo wasn't a bit afraid of him.

"But tell me, Aunt Pearly Gates, weren't you shocked to hear about Aunt Peachy? It seemed so sad for everybody to be glad she is dead. Betsy told me even her father was *glad.*"

The old woman stirred restlessly, and reaching under the covers turned the eggs which she was endeavoring to hatch.

"How did you feel, Aunt Pearly Gates, when you got the news that Aunt Peachy was dead? When did you hear it?"

"It wa' las' night, honey, las' night, 'bout half-past leben o'clock. Me 'n' Si had done been asleep fer some hours. I wa' kinder wo' out with one thing an' another an' I went off ter sleep early. I had woke up with a kinder tingling an eatchin' in my foots. You know sence I been took so bad I ain't had much er any feelin' in my foots. Mos' generally they air kinder numb lak. It's been a good thing they didn't never eatch, 'cause you see I ain't had no power ter lif' my foot up ter scratch an' I ain't had no power to lean down so fur to git to 'um. I ain't been able ter do mo'n jes' reach an' turn the aigs, which generally is about by my knees. Well, when this funny kinder tinglin' an' eatchin' struck me, befo' I know'd what I wa' a doin' I had lif' up my foot some and wa' a reachin' down to it an' found' myse'f a scratchin' er my big toe. I done it so nachul I didn't give it no min', but jes' went on a scratchin', enjyin' er myse'f considerable. Jes' then they wa' a big knockin' on the cabin do' an' Pete Turner hollered out, 'Aunt Peachy, over ter Bollings', is done fell down the steps an' broke her damn neck!' He never stopped ter say mo', but jes' went on a spreadin' the news on his way. Si 'n' I wa' so took back we

didn't have no time ter git shocked over Pete a cussin' ter us. An' you know what I done, Beck baby? I sot up straight in the baid an' I praised the Lord. I sot up so easy lak it didn't come ter my min' that I ain't sot up ter say straight, 'thout pillers a proppin' me, fur twenty years."

"Gawd in Heaven! What yo' doin', Pearly Gates?" said Brer Johnson. "Air you sick?"

"Sick! No; I reckon I'm well."

"An' then you know, Beck baby, it comed over me all of a heap that Aunt Peachy wa' daid, an' the conjer on me wa' lifted."

"You mean you won't have to stay in bed any more? How splendid! But surely, Aunt Pearly Gates, you don't really believe that old Aunt Peachy had any power over you. She couldn't have had."

"I don't know what to believe, chil'. All I know is that she air dead an' I kin scratch my big toe, which I ain't been able ter do fer twenty years. I mought a been gittin' better anyhow, jes' from the nachul co'se er events, but it do seem kinder strange that I took ter eatchin' an' scratchin' jes' 'bout the time ol' Mam' Peachy fell down the steps. I reckon I air gonter have ter learn ter walk all over, but I'm a gonter be

tryin' it befo' so very long, Miss Beck, baby.

"I'd be up an' at it now if it wa'n't fer this settin' er aigs. The chicks will be a comin' through any time now. I'm 'spectin' of em this very day. As fer that ol' duck aig—it'll jes' have ter spile. I ain't never 'lowed I'd turn myse'f inter no settin' duck."